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OLD SAVAGE

Novels by

JEAN DEVANNY

THE BUTCHER SHOP.

LENORE DEVINE.

OLD SAVAGE
AND OTHER STORIES

BY

JEAN DEVANNY

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3 HENRIETTA STREET, LONDON, W.C.2

First Published 1927

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
FRIENDS OF GOD'S ACRE	7
THE SOUL OF BLACK BILL HOGAN	22
THE WOMAN	47
TUI WITH ADDED YEARS	60
MRS. SALGAST'S BABY	96
"OLD SAVAGE"	117
PALS TILL HELL FREEZES	125
THE SPRINGS OF HUMAN ACTION	163
MAORI LOVE	190
THAT "ALMOST"	211
ROY PHIPPS AND HIS WIFE FEODORA	227
COLUMBINE	253
HER BIG IDEA	277
THE PERFECT MOTHER	296

OLD SAVAGE AND OTHER STORIES

THE FRIENDS OF GOD'S ACRE

You found me crying—beside the monument which marks the resting-place of that great soul whose pliant mind guided so wisely and so well the destinies of this little land.

It was not for sorrow I was weeping. I am not the sort that weeps for sorrow. It was for the solemnity of the hour and place, for the fresh peace of the spring evening. It was for the pure beauty of the narcissi planted all around the tomb, who shamed me with their stillness and reserve; for the great dark pines rising up into the sky, so sombre, yet sublime; the tangle of creepers and flowering plants upon the manuka behind.

No one else was there till you came. I was alone in that little amphitheatre with the dead; alone with my regrets and longings beside the colossal tomb. I remember a mystic fluence clung around, a secret, subtle essence that seemed to creep up from

the graves. The grasses were so rank and smelled of dead things in their world, too.

Then you approached the railing opposite me, fresh come from other lands. You told me afterwards that I smiled at you through tears. I saw you frown slightly, look all around uncertainly. I pressed my face against the iron bars and kept on looking at you and smiling. It must have been because you were so good to see. And I knew I was lovely, too. By and by you looked at me again, a long look this time, which persisted as you walked around and stood close to me and drank deep of the response that my eyes were giving to yours.

I liked you. I had an impulse then to want to be your friend. The print of many lands was stamped on you. I knew at a glance that yours were wandering feet. It is easy in a little land like this to know the stranger. I swept my hand towards the tomb and cried:

"Do you like it? Isn't it great?" And you replied very seriously:

"Yes, it is great." But you had no glance for the tomb and I knew at once that your allusion was to something you had found in me. I rejoiced.

The solemnity of the place now all departed. The mystic fluence turned to a cradle song of evening; the tomb crouched over resting hearts and quiet dreams, not vaults; the tremulous songs of mating birds came tumbling from the flowers, the shrubs;

those tall dark pines were no longer sombre sentinels but friends who knew the secret places of my life, and offered me protection.

I felt a wisp of laughter rise and gurgle in my throat. I felt the inward trembling of the starvelings of my soul. I felt the soft rich velvet of my skin grow rosy red, and drew my breath in rapture at your look.

And then, without another word, we walked away from there. We came down this same path. We stood just here, a little apart, and you asked me if I could name the many different bushes smothering the hill across from us. I could not. I had known them all my life and loved them as old friends but I did not know the name of one of them. So you pointed out each different plant and named it for me. I was amazed, knowing you were a stranger.

Then you told me of your life-work in the world of plants and men. You used big words and phrases till I pleaded for you to stop. I did not want your science then and I knew you were talking only to keep me with you. So I said at last:

"This is my garden, you know. No one else appreciates or even sees its beauties. I have watched the people pass through. I have watched them stroll around. Every day. And no one sees but me. I know every nook and corner of its two hills and little valleys. Let us walk around the

paths and get acquainted." And you replied with a smile that we had always been acquainted.

We did not talk any more for a while after that; just walked, with now and again a deep look into each other's eyes.

I felt it too good to be true, that sudden, sweet companionship. Soon, I thought, I shall wake from another of my dreams and become again the bearer of my burdens. For I was always dreaming till you came, my Friend, dreaming of other worlds than the one I had selected. It was the cause of half my troubles, that dreaming, hoping part. Even you admonished what you termed my slip-shod thinking. Others, less devoted than you, called it mooning.

I took a silly notion that you would slip off into the bush. I grabbed your arm and said so. You did not even smile. You looked surprised and said:

"Why should I?" I felt like a fool.

You pressed my arm against your side. We walked slower and slower yet, sometimes stopping amidst the tombs, or again amidst the ferns.

And something grew within us. I felt it had been always there but dormant, wanting contact for vitalization. It grew and grew and expanded until we both knew and told each other with our eyes that we were beset by it entirely. We were wrapped together by feeling, enswathed by a blanket of love.

I had loved men before. You had loved women, of course, but each of us knew in that first com-

munion that the content of this love spread to horizons unknown. It did not stir my senses into lust. Its quality was finer than the body. Perhaps I was a little tired of lust and common men's love. And you gave no inkling of desire.

The sun had set a long time, now. On top of the hill, by the tomb of the statesman, a grey veil was feathering round. But the air was warm with spring's promise ; the graves seemed to cling to the sun. We came at that time to a spot that was one of my favourites, a great sprawling bank of roses and honeysuckle fallen at the foot of a tree ; a lavish bed of sweetness and thorns.

"Let us stop here awhile," you said. It was right by the road. I cried out gladly :

"Yes. Oh yes ! We shall stop here ! Why not ? " But I hoped that none would pass that knew me. It was a little worm in my heart.

And then my mind began to reach out and grasp the subject of us two. It was the first time in my life I could not bear the thought of drifting. I wanted to know at once if you would stay with me. And if you would I searched for obstacles to our meeting. It made my lovely face grow troubled. I pulled a trail of roses over my breast and sighed. And with the ready wit I came afterwards to know so well you guessed the reason and said gravely that you hoped to stay in our city for a time.

"Shall we meet again ? " I asked. You answered that you hoped so, many times.

We sat on in the silvered dusk. I was content.

But when, after the last little ghost of a bird-call, you left me there beside the roses and the honeysuckle, although we had sat apart, although the quick handclasp at parting was all of substance there had been between us, a shining soft gladness was gilding my path through the following days, creating a world of my dreams.

I was an extravagant creature, I know. You often wished I were more of a woman.

That night I belonged in the air. I hovered in space and sucked life from your being. I was elfish, but down in the city was home, so to wake me to everyday life again I lifted a rose your foot had pressed and thrust the thorn at the back of its petals deep into the flesh of my hand.

There were rows when I returned to my home. But I did not care that night. I just sat and looked away from them and would not answer. I would not tell them where I had been. In the night, when I suffered the embrace of the other, I made up my mind to keep you on that ethereal plane, for the union of flesh means to a man either a beginning of ordinary commonplace life—or an end. For the common delights of the body a thousand men offered. I could go out into the market-place. And so could you.

I am lying among the growing things, writing this to you. A beetle with red body and gold wings has fallen on my paper. He fell with such a knock

that he seems stunned. But you taught me to be suspicious of the insect world. You taught me they pretended just as we do. I remember once I pretended to swoon off, just to see what you would do. And you did nothing. You laid me down on the grass and sat beside me and did nothing. I wonder if you knew. You never said.

Now the beetle has revived. He is making tiny noises with his wings and fluttering so delicately his febrile antennæ. But no! He is not there. He has gone, so swift I did not see the flight.

Those evening hours were but the faint beginning of our love, but yet they were the fairest I have known. They were a rainbow making promise of pots of gold.

Were those meetings really meetings? Can one meet him whom one has never really left? Sometimes we met in the morning, when the thick yellow sun sent us seeking the shade and we listened to the dropping of the water in the bush. Sometimes we climbed up the hill in the late afternoon, but most often we waited for twilight and dark.

Some people would think it strange, what happened in those meetings, I suppose. We were passionate man and woman, yet even in the dark we loved each other without desire. My fashionable friends, who had known me as lustful as themselves, would sneer and call it affectation, were they told the pure and mystic quality of our love.

And perhaps it was affected, on my part. I

often caught you looking strangely at me. The mind of woman is filled with affectations. She loves to delude and torment herself with troubles which are figments of her own imagination and call it fate. She loves to think herself sublime, and wicked, and to have men groping for the fibre of her soul. But I thought myself sincere. We always do.

Sometimes we did not talk at all, in those twilight communions in the city of the dead. At least, not with the common language of the tongue. But now and again some newly-discovered charm in this our Love-land would awaken a desire in you to have me companion your wanderings and you would enchant me with word-paintings of delicious reality. You transported me to olive groves through narrow stony gorges, into the open valleys of Palestine, and led me to the water of Jacob's Well from which to drink. You showed me sheets of moonlight resting on chilling precipice and peak in Switzerland. Our feet rustled the loose carpet of needles neath the still pines of Norway's fiorded coasts. Over the world we roamed and back again to our garden. You told me, too, that this little land of mine was lovelier than them all and braced my silly pride.

But I liked best those times in the starlight when we sat close on the iron seat in the midst of the tombs and looked out on the bay in calm content. The expanse of the harbour far out was dark with the

bluey-black of the pansy ; close in, it was streaked with the gold of the lights and flecked with white patches like steel. The hills were hung with a myriad jewels. They were stately, like women of old.

Once, to have looked on that beauty would have given me pain. Somehow, I could never bear beauty. Even the shine of my own lovely eyes in the mirror would stir me to pain. And as for the beauty of babies ! Ah, me ! Why, their little soft fingers and curly red toes belong on the rose trees whose bloom is perfection :—or else on the tops of the pines that are farthest from earth and the corruption of humans. Before you came I never looked on beauty without tears. I used to creep away from the sight of that bay, as I shut my eyes to the colour, and ran away from the streaming scent of the violet.

But after you came this was altered. I wondered a lot about that and I have often thought since of the night we discussed it. You told me it had been the incompleteness of my life, my loneliness. I had craved the spirit of beauty, which I had recognized as God, but the barren waste and bitterness of my life had kept it from me. The shining leaves, the sea, the sky, the air, held secrets from me till you came and mixed their essence with my blood and made us one. Henceforth, the stars and the growing things, my babies' limbs and the shine of my eyes, held no mystery for me. I had entered the

realm of the beautiful; I was lonely no longer; I saw with wide eyes; and the radiance from the world around crept into me serenely.——

Dear, did I hear you call?

But we were not always serious, nor always calmly content. At times we were merrily joyous, you in your quiet way and I in my more boisterous fashion, which you would gently check. I remember how you joked away my fears of the old chapel. I can see its broken windows looking down from where I write, as it nestles in the lowest hollow of our garden. It looked so gaunt in moonlight, so mysterious in the gloom. The great oak's boughs would scrape its roof, the leaves would whisper and rustle, and I would clutch at your arm in fright. The arum lilies grew close all around it. In the dark their white flowers were weird and ghostly. You said that my face looked the same. Yours did not. It was brown, almost black round the chin.

One night you lifted me in your arms and held my face down by a flower. I lay still and looked up at you, wanting to compare with the lily. You said:

"You are as pure as the flower, Leonora, but I could wish you were more of a woman."

And then you led me in the darkness in and out and up and down the little paths winding from the thickly scattered plots through the close native bush with its damp earthy smells. You pressed

my hand, you trembled, you murmured now and again. Once you said out loud :

" We are ghosts, Leonora. Just ghosts traversing a graveyard."

An uncertainty arose in my heart. The gloom crept out from the banks and lodged itself, like a wall, between us. The lusts I had known, the foul kisses and leers, took shape on the night like gnomes and danced and lured and beckoned, besmearing my love with the muck of their lechery.

But I beat the thing down and left you early.

Ah, Beloved ! In all those years you never asked from me. You never sought from me that which I did not offer. Not even in those so seldom, so sacred close embraces when your great heart-throbs hurled their passionate message against my breast relentlessly.——

I wish the birds would not make such glorious music.

You will not forget our singing birds, my friend, in that far land where the sweep of gorgeous plumage takes the place of whistle and song. You will not forget the bell-bird and the tui. I remember how you used to sit entranced and tell me after that no other bird in all the world could sing like that. But a little time ago I heard a human throat pour out such song. It was that Spanish-Italian singer who is holding the world in thrall. And there was the sprightliness, the freedom, in the woman of the bird. She knew no thraldom of her

own. She was not tied by common strings. One felt it. She lived like the birds in the tops of the trees, far from the soilure below; shone on by the first of the sunrays, which flushed her dark cheek with their gold and then crept in to line her round throat. Like the bell-bird she sang of the rapturous morning; her notes tumbled out honey spilled from the dew. She sang the strong dauntless notes of the tui when mating is past. One saw her look down from the tops of the pines to the great spreading trunks, the brown necks of earth's giants, and strive hard to swell out her own slender throat to get notes that were fitting expression. And once in her screaming aloft there was exactly the tui's harsh, clanging alarm.—I think I shall walk awhile.

Truly, my friend of God's Acre, this garden is lovely. A fantail is flirting above my head; back and forth he dances from punga to rangiora flower. I sit on the pathcurve now, with snapdragons, cherry-ripe and roses all around; those dear wee banksia roses that never seem to grow up.——

I have moved on to our daisies. We watched these daisies grow, my Friend, from the day that sorrowing mother planted the slips, to the great spreading bed they are now. But I think they have grown a lot since you left.

I have climbed the hill on the seaward side and sit in view of the bay. I look out on the harbour and think of the day you went away in that big new ship, the *Aorangi*. A panic rises in me! Oh!

God! That God I have always believed in, will he never send you back?

I can write of our years together; I can write of our love that is past with its joys and its sorrows, its heartaches and completeness, but I cannot daub paint on the future. I try to think that the future is like the blue of the hills round the harbour, a mock life, a myth, that is likely to vanish away like that blue, which is only created by distance. Even now the feathery clouds are sinking down upon it.

They could not last for ever, our jewelled years. I remember the night that began the end; when there again appeared the tenseness, the uncertainty, between us. The filaments of desire began to pluck at you one by one unceasingly and sometimes they swung out and sprayed me with their tendrils. At times in the sunlight you would turn your eyes from mine, for fear, as I well knew, that their appeal would cause me suffering. At night on the iron seat you never touched me.

I began to dread our meetings, for your desire was to me but lust. It was the thing in my life that had forged my fetters. It was linked in my life with destruction. I could not believe that my world would go on as it was if desire were allowed to unite us. You said I was selfish that night, my friend.—— But that was not yet. I knew that other things would creep in after that. I knew it was fatal to worlds that are carved out of dreams. I knew men so well and I had duties

towards others. You said I was selfish but I knew that that union must mean for me sacrifice—loss. It would be the beginning of another demand—or the end.

And then came the night when you took me. I think we were both a little distraught. We were crouched on the rough raw stone at the side of the chapel, our feet in the lilies. We were silent, both heavily thinking. And out of the broken window above us a cat leapt suddenly, over our heads. It was black as despair in the dark. Your hand pressed my mouth to stifle the scream. I was nervous and wanted to cry. The cat turned and stared at us, friendly enough, and I went forward and gathered it in my arms. But as I pressed my face into its yielding body it thrust up a paw and scratched my neck, then sprang away in the night. I cried out, then laughed. But you kissed away from my skin the red drops that oozed from the wound.

"Leonora!" you said, low and supplicating. But there was more in your touch than your words. It was hot and demanding. It was a call from a man to a woman.

I felt the rise of my passions to yours. I felt the creep of my body. But my instincts, my experience, still clamoured against it, and between the two forces my reason was lost. My duties to others were whirling about me like clouds. They were the things that said: "No!" But my pas-

sions and longings to please you were forcing me to you. I was tortured. You pressed me.

"Leonora!" you cried. "We are ghosts! We are ghosts! Lilies are all right in their place but live men need the red blood of women!"

And what could I do in a moment like that? You were there—and the thing that was there had to win. I looked at the lilies. I thought they were pure, fit for vases and tables and things. But they were not much use in this life, after all.

So we crushed them beneath us. Their stalks broke and spilled out their sap . . .

THE SOUL OF BLACK BILL HOGAN

"WELL, I ain't a marrying man, myself."

The words were almost nonchalant, but the speaker gave exaggerated attention to the business of cutting tobacco on the palm of his hand; and he shot an oblique, rather nervous glance at the girl beside him.

He was a huge man, a bulky man, with the wild shagginess about him of the Highland bull, yet saved from brutality by more than a hint of that animal's grace of muscle.

The girl was slight but strong-looking, with ordinarily an air of conscious superiority. Her uncovered hair flared red when the stabbing sunrays, eagerly opportune, darted through the barely rifted stormclouds. Her riding whip thrashed her legging nervously and on the carefully averted face there was registered a piteous disappointment.

Bill Hogan shifted his eyes and his attention from his hands to the weather conditions.

"Rain," he muttered, adding laconically: "And a hell of a lot of it.'

He turned to the browsing horses a few feet away,

caught the reins of one, looked thoughtfully at the girl, then without a word picked her up and placed her in the saddle.

"Now you gallop," he said. "Yer Dad'll be worried if you're caught in the storm."

But she made no move and when the man at last looked directly up into her face with a "Well, old girl?" she was gazing woodenly at the great toil-calloused hand resting on the horse's mane.

A cloud gathered in his eyes; furrowed the brow of this man on whom was stamped the indelible print of fierce and hard living. He looked about uncertainly, then:

"I'm sorry I ain't a marrying man," he said, and withdrew his hand. "Now, Kidson—Lou—he's——" Quick and staccato her voice broke in—

"Kidson! Kidson! What about him?" She leant swiftly towards him.

"Well," he said slowly. "A girl might do worse. Even a fine girl like you——. Hell!" The girl's whip had stung his face with vicious force, flinging him back with a jerk and closing his eyes involuntarily. When they opened, the thoroughbred she bestrode was reaching eager hoofs for home, with the girl lying flat on his back, her red-gold hair mingling with his flying chestnut mane.

The big man's facile tongue volleyed forth a broadside of profanity. Then he spat—an astonishing distance—walked to his horse, swung into the saddle and slowly followed after the girl. His

mouth clamped together and a savage glint shot from his long-ovalled, dissipated eyes.

"And I've been fair to her," he muttered. "The red-haired little savage! But I'll tame her; she won't whip Bill Hogan for nothing." He went on for a while thinking, then burst out again, loudly, as though spilling over with his grievance: "And I've been—I've been fair to her!"

He fingered his hurt, now becoming rapidly visible to his downward glance. Big drops of rain spread themselves on his great shoulders. He heaved them belligerently and shook the reins.

"Get up, Prince.—You've had your chance, my girl; now look out for Black Bill Hogan."

* * * * * *

Sally Bellairs, daughter of Monty Bellairs, owner of —— Station, owned to full twenty-five years; and at twenty-five the fallow soil of one's virginity awaits impatiently the coming of the tiller. Not that Sally need have waited. Sally was fine to look at; she possessed in abundance that mysterious attraction best described as the "come hither in the 'ee." Suitors for Sally's hand and hair, with her temper thrown in, were scattered widely about the countryside.

As a matter-of-fact, Sally's maidenhood was due solely to the one definite result of a most expensive education; namely, a finely discriminating, in fact a most fastidious, taste in regard to the male of

the species. Her robust mind had clearly outlined the ideal one and only. Strength of body, of course, she considered essential ; a dash of Romance equally so. Conventional good looks mattered not at all. Morals ? Well, truthfully, Sally had pushed the question of morals tentatively aside in her maiden meditations on the matrimonial venture. A sensible, up-to-date girl, she understood well enough that the subject of morals was one to be approached very carefully indeed these times. But the one indispensable adjunct to a future life-partner, she had decided, was a certain measure of refinement.

Old Monty Bellairs was plain man enough. He favoured hard work and simple ways and angered his high-falutin wife by openly encouraging Lou Kidson's attentions to Sally.

Kidson was his manager.

It was from her mother that the girl had acquired an exaggerated sense of the importance of such deferential trifles as the opening of a door, the tying of a shoelace ; things her observant sister battling for a crust in the industrial arena learns soon enough are but meaningless acts of condescension. But Sally's ideal featured nothing very extraordinary. Round the Bay stations and mills and farms strong men abounded ; Romance was there too, with its tongue in its cheek ; morals of all sorts and conditions ; refinement aplenty, yet —Sally had waited.

Waited for Black Bill Hogan, it seemed.

Shearing season came around in its good old way, and with it, of course, came the shearers. Now, old Monty was too strong a personality not to have infused a fair supply of his blood into the veins of his daughter, and thus Sally had inherited, along with her mother's fanciful notions, a certain amount of his hard " horse sense." A rather rare and most interesting combination in a woman, especially in a woman with Sally's hair and wideplaced eyes.

Therefore, when Bill Hogan's trenchant personality had fired her fancy in the clipping shed one day, roused an interest in her mind and brought an eager look to her eyes, this good sense flew the danger signal and Sally had decided to keep out of his way. But unfortunately for her, Hogan had looked up from his work, expert shearing nothing short of sleight-of-hand, and had seen the fineness of her. Worst of all, he had seen the interest, the eager look. He knew the look well. For Hogan, a common shed-hand, or rather an uncommon shed-hand (for his vocabulary of strange and strong, if somewhat unpicturesque, language, and his rude strength of mind and body were uncommon even among those men whose average in these things is an achievement)—Hogan was a lady killer, a regular Don Juan in a cheap way. Judging by the stories detailed by himself nightly to a most appreciative bunk-house audience (for Hogan was nothing if not consistent in his pursuit of vice) his

amatory experiences had been many and varied, and it was a fact (he vouched for this himself) that his victims of the fair sex had been by no means confined to his own class.

Hence it was truly a misfortune that Hogan had seen the familiar look in Sally's eyes. Good sense and instinctive recognition of vice would have been sufficient protection if this had not happened, for then the game would have remained in Sally's hands.

But Hogan was a man of tenacious purpose, of subtle resource when once his mind was made up. Therefore Sally often met him in the lengthening evenings, riding on Sundays, Hogan on the beautiful black horse which was as well known on the Bay stations as himself, and which Sally admired prodigiously.

So she said.

And he was not the man to let the grass grow under his feet. Besides the wool-cut was not of many weeks duration.

And Sally's good sense had not been equal to the strain. The sheer virility of the man overwhelmed her, though she could not fail to sense the barely restrained profligacy, the hardly hidden animalism.

And as for that indispensable measure of refinement—!

The coarseness of his speech had at first disgusted her,—but only at first. She had tingled

with shame in privacy. Black Bill Hogan! And she! who had despised the legitimate pretensions of Lou Kidson, her father's choice and at least a gentleman.

The days passed.

Sally's training had naturally developed in her the habit of conventionality, and consequently she was worried almost to death over her entangled affections. Hogan was wooing her violently, and the idea of other than a proposal of marriage from him never entered her head. Was she not Sally Bellairs, and he her father's shed-hand? She believed that her father's love would yield the point of Hogan's uncouthness, of his inferiority of class, but also she knew what a stickler he was for clean living in his direct associates. More than once Sally had heard Hogan's little escapades discussed by men about the station. She was sure her Dad would never give his girl to a rake, even to a reformed one.

That the big man would reform, she, in her soul purity, had no doubt whatever. She set much too high a value on her own influence, on her comparative superiority of station and mentality to doubt it.

After a great deal of thought and a few more now mutually sought meetings, she had figured out that they might as well take the initiative and see how the land lay, anyhow.

That Hogan had up till now made no definite

proposal she believed was due to his realization of the class distinction between them. She could not know that something was happening to Hogan, something strange and puzzling that queered his temper and made his prose a wondrous thing of such livid profanity as sent him even several notches higher in the esteem of his mates.

For the first time in his life Hogan was at a loss with a woman.

As usual he had set out for a few weeks amusement. It had never been his way to take account of the broken wings which might never arise again. Though he usually was most discreet in his selections. In justice it must be admitted that he had not imagined Sally would consider marriage with a shearer. He had placed her, at first, with the usual of her class who stooped to dalliance with men of his type; women who conferred favours on him and received his hole-and-corner fashion.

But he had found a difference in Sally. Once she had accepted his attentions she elevated him to her own class. She paid him the respect he found himself unwittingly and grudgingly according her. All unconsciously on her part, of course, for Sally was only following the natural bent of her nature, which was fine.

And Hogan, these days, did some thinking.

"How" he asked himself, "can a bloke play up with a girl who smiles at him like a holiday and asks him please not to say 'hell' quite so often as

she wants her friends to be nice ? Her friends ! By God ! Me ! Black Bill Hogan ! "

The day he grasped the fact that Sally actually anticipated a proposal of marriage from him, he floundered hopelessly in a sea of troubled wonderment.

That night his mates called on him for one of his frolicsome yarns. They jossed him in the usual way about his proverbial amours and to his secret amazement and even chagrin he found himself saying :

" Look here, you wool-bugs ! All them yarns I told yer was lies. They was interestin' enough when I was in the mood, but I've shed me milk teeth now and I ain't tellin' any more. Savee ? "

His companions were almost blasted with surprise, but Bill's quiet look around as he stubbed the tobacco into the bowl of his pipe suppressed remark for the time being ; for his temper had really been queer lately and his punch !—well, it was some punch, I tell you.

He had gone out into the night, had walked to the homestead and actually hung around.

" Just like a bloomin' Romeo," he vociferated disgustedly. Yes, " bloomin' " was the word. Oh, the potency of a well-placed love.

The gods would appear to have been prodigally liberal with undeserved favours. Sally alone was a prize worth aspiring to ; Monty Bellairs' daughter was a catch even for affluence.

And Hogan was a penniless shearer.

But—— Hogan possessed a soul, and there you have it. And he did not possess any stereotyped opinions regarding the desirability of pomp and circumstance. His horse, his pipe, a moderate thirst, had been the essentials of Hogan's physical existence—necessities. The women had been the amusements, violently desired, perhaps, for a limited period, usually very limited, but mere adjuncts—mere adjuncts.

And this soul of Hogan's was a vivid thing that craved space and motion; that ill-brooked constraint; allowed no physical inhibitions. The only call it answered was the clean, sweet wind-whistling allurement of the open roads; the mysterious, insistent beckonings of the enchanted distances never failed of response. He knew the lure of the ripened cornfield. He laughed at the sun-glint on dancing leaves and whipped his great naked body whenever possible with the chill of running mountain waters. The soft shimmerings of dewy night reflected in his mood; he had recoiled and felt the vitals of his being loosen before the emblazoned glories of the East. And always the places afar were waiting.

Hogan had never attempted to give a name to this part of himself. He was rather ashamed of it, in fact; it seemed to detract somehow from his manhood, and perhaps he had drunk the harder, sworn the fiercer, wooed more callously because of

its presence. But he knew it was there and not to be denied.

Marriage !——

The very word weighted him with ominous warning. Marriage was an anchor, a thing of involved responsibilities and risks, and yet,—when Hogan would seek to focus his mind on this aspect of marriage, those little hands would come reaching ; those wide-placed eyes would smile expectantly into his and that shimmering crown of copper seduce his senses.

He was in love. He knew it and groaned.

He groaned because of what had come to him side by side with his love. Sally's respect had done it. Side by side with his love had grown a sense of decency which must surely have lain dormant somewhere within his huge frame.

He knew that Sally expected marriage. He knew she loved him. He knew also, or thought he did, what Monty Bellairs would think of the proposition. Marriage between him and Sally, then, would mean for him steady work, a settling down, a denial of his soul's demands. It was impossible, he knew. He ceased to think and merely suffered. Which was good, very good, for it sent Black Bill Hogan past another milestone on the road to redemption. For the first time in his life he took account of the broken wings. It was not Bill's love which did this, for

his love was purely physical; it was that sense of Decency.

Had Sally ever paraded her superiority before him, ever suggested inequality, he would have laughed, and either won out on his usual methods, or got out, with perhaps the love, but with an accompanying sense of failure and without the redeeming one of decency. Considering Sally's hair and temper one can be sure it would have been the latter; and Black Bill Hogan would have remained "black"; would have probably taken on a duskier hue.

But Sally's respect and trust——.

Yes, that was it! Her trust. Hogan clung to that word when he caught it. He thought it was funny he had not seen before how good that word was. He did not think that he had not encountered its essence before. He felt himself in a quandary and wished his newly-acquired principles in hell. Then he forgot himself entirely in worrying over Sally. He saw that she must suffer whichever way things went, but this new sense at last pointed out the way she would suffer least and he decided to leave her.

Sally, at an arranged meeting, had given him the direct lead she thought he waited for and he had, with outward calm, deliberately thrown her back on herself. With his man's strength he had shown himself indifferent to her, tired of her, even.

But it was real generosity which had prompted the mention of Kidson's name.

Sally, naturally, had taken his mention of Kidson as insult added to injury, and thrown Hogan into the throes of reaction. For this man was proud, and that such treatment should be accorded his initial venture into the realms of chivalry, his very first assumption of the burden of self-sacrifice, roused all the old vicious arrogance; stirred into uncontrol the suppressed ferocity of his desire.

For Hogan wanted Sally as he had never wanted anything in his life before. He craved for her touch with all the strength of his huge body. The temptation to marry her recklessly and let her return to the station when his soul's demands became irresistible, had been tremendous, his winning fight a thing of supreme endeavour.

Come to think of it, Hogan was a leaven of all the material that makes for greatness. He was savage under the humiliating whipcut. The storm overtook him, and, finding in its elemental fury a half-solace, he turned his horse and rode back into its murk.

It cleansed him.

Thinking, he glimpsed the reason behind Sally's action; vaguely caught her point of view and named himself a fool. That night he somehow conveyed a careful message to the homestead and he and Sally met in a rain-drenched copse. Met truly this time, for Hogan unburdened himself.

He talked to Sally with the fervour of his soul behind his rough idiom. He told her of his great unworthiness, of his vicious living and callous disregard of inflicted pain. Above all, he strove to make her understand that thing in him which made it necessary for him to leave her.

And Sally understood as far as her more practical nature would allow. She wanted Hogan, but she was old enough to value properly the fleshly comforts and luxuries accruing to her present life. She must have Hogan, she felt now; the material interests without him would be tasteless, but with him—Ah! with him——!

Hogan dared not move with the sweetness of her. One minute he felt that he was drowning in a well of pure joy; the next he was involved in a torment of battle with the fiery quality of a desire which took hardly to the first experience of bridling. Sally made it hard. She caressed his hurt face with her mouth; she snuggled her sweet little daintiness within his rough coat, bringing unaccustomed words from him. "Little Lady!" he breathed. "Little Love! Dearness!" until Sally felt herself indomitable to battle for her love.

But she kept her own counsel. She did not want advice or attempted domination from him. She saw that there must be no clipped wings, no settling down, for this man, and that such freedom was possible only through her father's acceptance of him.

It was inevitable that this period of unrest of mind and body should leave its mark on Sally. Her tongue, never well-flavoured, in this crisis of her life, became tinged with an acerbity nothing short of biting. Strangely, it was just this that gave her the opening she desired with her father. Her mother, at this time, as almost always, was gallivanting.

Old Monty Bellairs, smoking a quiet pipe on the veranda one day, turned a speculative eye on Sally as she joined him. He had heard her ranting at a maid within.

"What you want, Sally, is someone to tame you down a bit."

She leaned against the post and regarded him discontentedly. He went on quietly.

"I have not seen Kidson about the house lately. Have you turned him down ?"

She padded the veranda edge with her heel—then made her decision. There was noticeable a marked resemblance between them as she turned to him and spoke relevant to his first remark.

"Yes, that's just what I do want. Someone to tame me. Do you think Kidson could do it ? Now look at me, Dad ; you and I both know Lou. Could he, or would he, tame me ?"

He glanced at her and reflectively pulled at his beard. Then turned and walked the boards.

"Well, if you liked him well enough. He is a fine chap, Sally. None better."

"Dad! I like Lou—well enough. But I want to marry a man I love,—a man I love! Love! Love!"

Her strange vehemence startled him—her heightened colour and defiant bearing. His manner suddenly became stern, and he strode towards her.

"Love! Love!" he repeated, and looked close into her eyes, trembling at what he saw therein. "Who is it, Sally?"

And then Sally realized the enormity of the thing she meant to ask of this man; this man who idolized her, whose first law of being was her own protection. But she knew that now was the time and she spoke the name clearly.

"It is Bill Hogan, Dad."

His glance left her and travelled round his surroundings. He was thinking, she saw.

"Bill Hogan? Hogan?"

Then it struck him—literally struck him. His face crimsoned, purpled. He seemed to swell, to tower over her.

"Bill Hogan! Black Bill Hogan! That——" The dreadful oath he roared out whitened Sally's lips but she stuck.

"Yes, Black Bill Hogan! I love him and I want to marry him." She gathered courage. "And what's more, I will marry him, Dad."

He lifted a clenched fist to strike her, recollected himself in time and struggled for control.

"Marry him! Marry Hogan! You! My daughter!" He whirled to the doorway. "I'll shoot the——" But Sally was behind him when he entered his room and when he turned with his gun it was to find the door locked. He was a prisoner, for he knew that his stiff frame could not essay the drop from the window. His language would have done credit to Hogan himself. Then he calmed.

"That won't help you any, my girl," he called. "You can't keep me here for ever. I'll teach Mr. Black Bill Hogan to try his tricks on my daughter." There was no reply. Not for just exactly half-an-hour. Then Sally thought that the first shock had had time to spend itself and she answered him as though he had just spoken.

"Listen to me, Dad. Hogan has not been trying his tricks on your daughter at all. Hogan was everything you think him; his way of living was disgustingly brutal. He has told me how vicious he was. Understand, Dad? I know all you know of Hogan. I understand exactly just what he was. But he is not like that now, Dad. I want you to listen to me while I tell you just what Hogan is now. Will you listen? Say the word and I'll unlock the door."

He rasped out a laugh.

"He's fooling you, girl. That's Hogan's way. I know him, Sally. You can't tell me anything about Hogan."

"Will you listen, Dad?"

He smote the door with clenched fist.

"Unlock the door, girl, or I'll—I'll——" He stopped futilely, spluttering.

And then Sally began to sob. Not wildly, hysterically, but with restraint, as though each upheaval was wrenched from her unwillingly, as indeed it was.

This was too much for Monty. He fought for power to resist her, but in vain. He let fall the gun, which he had been holding in one hand all the time, and cried out:

"Sally! Don't do it, sweetheart! Come and tell your Dad!"

She tumbled into the room, into his arms, and he drew her onto his bed. He smoothed her hair soothingly while she clung to him, his face taking on a bleak, aged look, while all the rancour of which his kindly nature was capable crystallized into a savage hate for Hogan. By and by he questioned her. Sally kept nothing back; there had always been a comradeship between these two.

Thinking to enlighten her, to disillusion her, he related stories of Hogan, related them shrinkingly, ashamed of their mention before his daughter. He was flustered, bewildered, to find that she knew; had been told by Hogan himself. More than bewildered to find that, knowing, she could still love, could still desire marriage with the man. He stood away from her and examined her in a dis-

concerted, curious fashion. Sally shrugged impatiently.

"You are shocked that I should know such things, aren't you, Dad. I don't know why you should have placed me on a pedestal. You fathers seem to think that your daughters can grow up blind and deaf and dumb. Why, Dad, I could tell you things, things that happened to girls at school.—— But never mind that. I am made of the same stuff, the same old flesh and blood, that you are; and as Bill Hogan is for that matter. It is all a question of heredity and environment I know—I know! If Bill had had a chance . . . Why, he is great in some ways, Dad. Listen!"

She told of Hogan's resolution to leave her; of his fine control under her unstinted caresses the night before; comparing it with treatment received from men of their own class; treatment unprovoked.

"I tried Hogan out last night, Dad, and I'll tell you that with the exception perhaps of Lou, I know no man so trustworthy. Just think of his past life, Dad, of his love for me, and look at me." She stood radiant with enthusiasm and held her arms towards him. "Am I not lovely enough to tempt any man? And I put myself into Hogan's keeping entirely last night."—Bellairs groaned—"I told him I was his entirely. I deliberately tormented him and yet to-day I am unharmed. I am still the same Sally Bellairs." She flung her

arm round him. "I want Hogan for ever, Dad. I love him so much—so much—. Talk to him, dear. Go down among the men and watch him. He is different in every way. And he thinks I am letting him go. He thinks he is going out of my life. You will keep him for me, Dad, you will? Oh, Dad!" Her face was glorious; her voice a wonder. "I want him—for marriage, darling. I want—" She locked his eyes with hers—"I want—his children."

Monty Bellairs lifted her up; crushed her in his embrace.

"But that's just it, Sally girl." He was torn between conflicting emotions. His face was grey. "You know more of life than I thought. What if Hogan is not fit for fatherhood? How can we know all things of him? Sally! Sally! This is a thing I never dreamt of! What a problem! And yet—" His head turned from side to side as he tried to view this thing from every angle.

"You would want to be sure that Hogan was—was clean, Sally? You would not persist in marrying him if everything was not as it should be?"

"Dad!" Sally's voice was faltering, for the strain of the battle had been great and now that victory was in sight she weakened. "Dad, I think—I am sure from what Bill said to me last night that we need have no fear. But I will make sure. I promise you. You can make sure for you have that right. Oh, Dad—dearest!"

Bellairs lifted her on to the bed. He tended her gently as a woman ; brought her tea ; made much of her.

" Come and lie down with me, Daddy. We will rest together, to-night." She slept soundly in his arms the whole night through, while he——. The morning light showed him an old, old man.

Such the heritage of parenthood down through the ages.

* * * * * *

When Bellairs walked into the clipping shed and looked around for Hogan he found that he was not there ; had not commenced work that morning. He walked across to the bunkhouse. Hogan's horse was there equipped for the road.

So he really intended going, thought Monty. Then why not let him go ? He could tell Sally that he had been too late. He delayed his progress, almost turned,—but he knew that he could not face her with the lie. He could not hurt her so. Then Hogan came to the door, saw him and waited.

Bellairs could not conceal his distaste, nor his hatred of the man, so that Hogan at once sensed significance in his approach. A little surprised sullenness was distilled from his mood. He lighted his pipe while he waited. He had done his best; he reckoned that even Bellairs could decently demand no more of him. He had played up to the

standard of the best. But his fight had left him "frazzled" as he expressed it; he had shamed his own record in the sheds the day before; and he was in no mood now, to take any "back chat" from Bellairs. His code in regard to the girl did not include her father. Damn Bellairs, anyhow.

Curiously, Bellairs' first thought was that the man looked as though he had not slept for a week. Then as he stood there inarticulate, Hogan's eyes opened wide and lingered on him.

"What's wrong, Bellairs? You look all mussed up," he almost jeered.

Their eyes gripped.

"Hogan, I could kill you." It was not what the old man had intended saying. What use was his spleen? But Sally—his Sally! And Black Bill Hogan! He took off his old slouch hat and wiped the sweat of mental agony from his brow.

The other's malevolence fell away from him tamely, to be replaced gradually by a strange emotion he did not understand was compassion. Her father! He knew nothing about fathers. Evidently the old man was suffering. Well, he had suffered too, this last week or two. That was something they had in common, he and Bellairs, the capacity to suffer over that girl. And suddenly he was impelled to speak, the words coming from him with a strange gentleness.

"Yes, that must be so, Bellairs." He knocked the ashes from his pipe against his boot-heel.

"Don't worry, old man, I'm off to-day. Now, in fact. I've seen Kidson. Neither you nor—nor anyone belonging to yer need fear trouble from me."

Up till now Bellairs had acted by virtue of his love for Sally alone. His reason had flayed his conscience; had weighted him with an almost paralyzing despair. But to find Hogan meeting him thus—to find Sally's faith in the man thus justified, why, perhaps, after all—perhaps?

He tugged at his beard and stared at Hogan, much in the manner he had last night scrutinized Sally. Surely that splendour of form, that rugged beauty, held no taint of blood. His thoughts became quite unruly. What a man this would have been had he been given a chance—the chance Sally had spoken of, the chance to develop the potentialities so evidently inherent in him.

"How old are you, Hogan?" he asked.

"Well, I don't rightly know. Ain't sure, but guess I must be somewhere round twenty-nine." He spoke hesitatingly, uneasily, looking speculatively at Bellairs.

The old man started.

"What! Twenty-nine! Twenty-nine! I would have judged you to be forty. Twenty-nine is youth—and—and—at twenty-nine many things are possible, Hogan. Many things."

The blood receded from the big man's face. He took the pipe from between lips that had begun to tremble and clutched it in a fist in front of him,

half pointing at Bellairs. His eyes fixed on Bellairs with the dawn of an incredible delight flickering in their depths.

Bellairs faced about and spoke again.

"Sally is very much in love with you, Hogan. You know that—you know that."

Hogan seemed to collapse. He fell back against the door of the bunkhouse, and Bellairs was appalled by the intensity of feeling that found inadequate expression in his whispered oaths: "Oh hell! Oh hell! Oh hell!" Then suddenly he straightened up, stepped over to the other man and thrust a pugnacious jaw into his face. "Think what yer saying, man! What are yer puttin' over on me, aye? I ain't in the mood to stand any foolin'. Don't play with me or I'll—I'll——" But his mimic savage mood broke up: his voice trailed off in a sort of whine and he stood there nodding helplessly, staring into Bellairs' face.

Perhaps he saw a likeness to the girl there; or perhaps that little glimmer of hope held out by Bellairs had melted his savage crust to the condition of soft impotence that the shimmerings of dewy night induced in him. However it was, of a sudden he dropped his shaggy head and gave vent to a piteous: "Oh, God! Sally!"

Then Bellairs spoke quickly.

"It is all right Hogan. Sally tells me that she has made a man of you. I can't understand it, but it seems she is right. So long as you are clean,

Hogan—so long as you are clean. You get me ? " He paused.

" Clean as—as yerself, in that way, Bellairs. 'Fore God ! "

" I believe you. Then, since Sally has done so much with you already I'll give her a chance to finish the job. Oh, I say—don't—don't do that, Hogan ! Bill ! "

For Hogan—Black Bill Hogan—was sobbing.

THE WOMAN

" You're better dead ! You're better dead ! Just sand and sea and sky and bush and- and——. Oh, God ! But that sun does hurt ! "

She sat upon the leafless red vines that sprawled all over the tops of the high sandhills rising in front of her almost from the ocean's lip. The leafless vines were thick with red berries which crushed beneath her and stained her skirt with their juices. She crushed them with her hands, too. Behind her, tough shrubs, tarwinie and gorse, mantled the terrace leading back to the low hills upon which charred skeletons of fallen forest giants lay thickly.

It was spring and the gluttonous sheep were unable to gorge all the tender grasses thrown up by the virgin land.

To her right the sand and cleared hills stretched away to the horizon but on the other hand the hills remained untouched by axeblade ; they lay in proud repose as though conscious that man would not dare to despoil their grandeur. They were supreme.

Down below the woman a tiny inlet crept from

the ocean into the foot of these hills, a mere finger of the sea narrow enough at one point for a swing-bridge to be thrown across it to the flax mill on the other side. Around this mill lay tiny paddocks, their floors golden with drying fibre, their fences heavily laden with twisted hanks. Men moved among the flax. The woman clearly heard their coarse voices shouting their conversations. She could hear the vivid oaths that embellished every remark and she knew that they knew she could hear and that they did not care. Why should they ? She swore herself ; so did her girls.

She sat on with tight lips, gazing straight out before her, thinking her painful thoughts, unheeding the passage of time, not rousing even to the chill of the lowering day or the departure of the men from the paddocks. Obviously she awaited something.

Her home, a three-roomed shanty, unpainted except by nature's elemental artistry, stood in a small clearing back among the shrubs, and of a sudden, just as the sun's top rim dropped in ungodly splendour beneath the flat of the waters, there came from its direction a raucous shout.

The woman started violently, but she did not withdraw her eyes from the spectacle before her. She lingered yet awhile and clutched at the open front of the man's shirt she wore in lieu of a blouse. Then for a moment she shut her eyes tightly before rising and taking the path to her home. Again

she muttered: "God! How it hurts! Just sand and sea and sky. Year in, year out. Just —just hell!"

The man she lived with stood in the doorway and eyed her as she approached with a sulky belligerency. He was wrinkled, prematurely aged with hard and unprofitable toil and his skin was burnt to the hue of raw kauri gum. He was dirty, too. He began to heckle her, being lean-bellied with afternoon's fast.

"You're a nice one! What's the meanin' of this? Fire out and no tea ready at this time of day. We're hungry, we are." He noticed her face and stopped, then added lamely: "What's the matter, anyhow? Ain't sick, are yer?"

The middle-aged woman had haggard lines around her mouth and the dulled eyes of painful introspection. She would not meet his look.

"No, I ain't sick. Leastways, I—I——" She looked around her helplessly. What could she say to that man, that man of common clay whose vulgar entity was as far from her spiritual life as his gnarled body had been physically close. How tell him understandingly of that thing within her bosom for which she herself could not account? She had no words, no method of expression. A reservoir of emotions lay within her always gently stirring like deep waters churned from below and sometimes, as on this day, erupting with such violence as to shake her to the core.

"I—I was just seeing the sunset," she said wearily.

"Just seein' the——" The man stopped again. His obtuseness grasped the fact that something was amiss. He was puzzled. "Aw, women!" He shrugged resignedly and walked over to the woodpile.

But the two girls inside were not so easily appeased. They continued to nag at her while lighting the fire and washing themselves.

Their days were spent in helping the man in felling and fencing and sowing. Indeed they worked at this labour as heavily as he did, and, daughters of him entirely, had through their manner of living cast off almost all semblance of femininity, mentally and physically. Their voices were gruff through shouting in the open, their heads were cropped short, their hands calloused and great. Nevertheless, despite the heavy clogging boots, they were graceful as wild animals in their movements; primitive women, mature at fifteen. They climbed ferinely; swam superbly, ran straight-limbed and swift and their bodies were covered with a soft mat of glistening, fine hair. They were twins. Seventeen years old now, their sex natures were developing, and their man's manner of living was developing them along the lines of the male. They had lived quite alone until the erection of the mill six months before and the eruption of menfolk into their hitherto quiet lives

had disturbed them strangely. Sex contacts hurried their development. Unrestrained and untutored, ignorant of all knowledge of conventional usage and of the reason for the peculiar delight they experienced in the man-touch, they were now full of mysterious promptings quite beyond their simple powers of diagnosis. Consequently, a spirit of impatience and intolerance towards the ordinary, old-time things possessed them. While splitting the fence palings or twisting the wire at their work they pondered dreamingly, and, being one, often gazed upon each other in questioning wonder. They would work well and swiftly these latter days; to get home early and, tea over, mingle with the "flaxies" across the inlet.

To them, then, the non-preparation of the evening meal meant an hour stolen from their sweet sex-commingling. They felt cheated, and nagged at the woman, who began to slice long strips from a side of home-cured bacon. Hopelessness sat heavily upon her, but the young discontents were too selfish to notice.

At table they chattered of the football they would play upon the mudflat left by the receding tide. The woman ate nothing, and her mate, vaguely troubled by her demeanour, spoke roughly and pushed the bread before her.

"Here, Mum. Ain't yer eatin'?"

She shook her head with merely a glance at him. He shuffled uneasily and cast stealthy glances from

her to the noisy girls. A shamed sympathy possessed him. Habitual repression disallowed expression of the feeling, however, so he said, blusteringly: "Aw, shut up, you two! Yer're always cacklin'. Cut it!"

They looked up astonished, but otherwise undisturbed. Very soon they rushed away.

The man lit his pipe and sat upon the woodpile while his wife washed up the dishes. This strange mood of hers always distressed him, but to-night it seemed more intense than usual. Uneasily he wondered "if the ol' woman could be goin' off her head." He remembered what a surveyor had told him once: "You know, Bill, this is no place for a woman. Especially for an extraordinary woman like your wife."

He had been uneasy then, and nonplussed; had wondered in what way his wife could be extraordinary. He had never really known any other woman; had thought them all alike, fanciful and unreasonable at times and then again, wonderful. Now he thought of their early marriage days; how the small-town girl had enthused over the glories of bush and sea and sky when he had taken up these hundred acres and brought her to this place.

But youth and love had flowered their path in those days and she—— He went back again to that time at sunset when she had stood poised upon the sandhill top and thrown her arms wide in an embrace of mighty nature. And he heard again the

thrill of her voice and caught her words: "Right into the heart of it! Into its blood-red heart!"

And there had seemed to him to be the glory of the setting sun within her. He had held his breath for fear her dainty form would leave the earth and vanish actually into its "Blood-red heart." She had appeared to him a spirit, a spirit of Womanhood incarnate, and he remembered how he had feared to take her in his arms that night, feared to desecrate the sacredness of her.

He stirred; rose up uneasily. His pipe was out. He looked about.

"She might be different," he whispered. "She might be better——" He also had no words and struggled for expression, finding suitability in the word "beyond." "Yes, she might be beyond other women." Then after a while: "She must go back home for a spell. A 'oliday'll do her good."

* * * * * *

He was part of his environment; had been born in a bush camp and with his first breath inhaled the incense arising from resinous logs aflame; his new-opened eyes had flirted with the swayings of forest growths; his young ears had hearkened to the converse of the woods and his understanding of the universal been developed within the restricted circle compassed by the laws of the wild.

And the small-town woman had been happy enough until the expected arrival of child had pre-

vented her accompanying him to work. How she had delighted in the crashing of the huge rimu and rata logs to earth! And yet she had cried once when it had been necessary for him to drop a rata in time of bloom. She had cried and pressed her hand upon her heart as the passionate crimson needles had been crushed in the fall. He had petted her without understanding.

"It's just like the blood in my heart," she had wailed. "And all the honey in the flowers is wasted now."

Always it had been the red flowers, the red shells, the red vines and the red sunsets. In February, when the bush fires were blazing afar and smoke hung all about hiding the vault of heaven and stifling the breath of man and beast, she waited upon the hilltop each evening for the incomparable sunsets. Terrible, at such times, was the mighty one's sanguinary descent below the ocean's edge.

And the woman, one of those rare, precious souls arisen, inexplicably, like a human efflorescence from common clay, would tremble at the spectacle. She would feel dimly that she was but an extension of the natural phenomena around her; her sympathy with the growing things would torture her and dissolve her in tears of self-pity for the state of mind she could not understand but which seemed her doom. She could not understand! The struggles of the poet in her for freedom; the voluptuous cravings of the artist for expression were to her but

manifestations of a mysterious malady of the spirit, a madness of the soul which plunged her at times into depths of melancholy despair.

* * * * * *

The man went to the shanty door.

"Come fer a walk, Mum," he said.

* * * * * *

The woman went away for a three months' holiday the following week, and the man pondered much in his necessarily slow way during the first weeks of her absence. For the first time in his life he saw woman as something more than a human animal; he came to think during those weeks that life was not the simple thing he had thought it; was instead worryingly complex. He began to watch his girls with a shamefaced curiosity and to experience moments of acute fear for, and doubt of, them.

Then one day he was beset by a revolutionary idea. At the time he was thinking aggrievedly that it was hardly fair his marriage should have resulted in a family of three women, three incomprehensible creatures (for he unconsciously reckoned that a woman's daughters must be of her own kind) far removed from the satisfactory simple man nature, and only one man to contend with them, when it struck him that in justice, since things had happened so, those three had more claim to consideration than solitary himself. He

tried to forget the idea, but that his innate decency would not allow, so, after much torturesome cogitation he trudged home one evening determined to sell out and take the "pesky" women back to civilization.

His heart was heavy for the herd instinct had found no abiding place within him; his manner of living was as that of the wild kindreds. He craved the temples of nature, he hated the tabernacles of man.

He neared his home. How dreary and empty a home it was without Mum! The girls had preceded him by an hour, to tidy up and prepare a meal, but nothing they did seemed right. Their "tidying up" resulted in worse confusion; the food they prepared gave his appetite no encouragement. He trudged along dolefully, paying no heed to the luxuries of colour sea and sky were taking to themselves from the setting sun. His meagre mind was set upon his sacrifice. To live in a city! His dull imagination could not grasp the full significance of such a life; nor did he try to analyse his passion for the solitudes; his blunt sensibilities could only feel that the spaces were home and life, that the city, for him, meant disaster.

He looked around his property as he walked. Pretty hard land; much of it still claimed by tarwinie and gorse, but how he loved those succulent hills at the back! The blatting of his few sheep was all the music he cared to hear and as his eyes slid

off the land and moved oceanwards for the first time a response awoke in him to the glory of that great declining orb. It had always been there but until now he had not seen it. The dawn, the day, the setting sun and the darkness. They had been all of a piece to him and that piece the weft of life itself, but he had noticed them no more than he had thought to listen for the running of the blood in his veins. He halted his tired walk and blinked at the robust splendour that flamed across the heavens and streamed through space dissolved in a myriad tints. A golden, flickering haze intrigued with distances and places and warmed the thin body of him. It marred his vision so that when he saw the woman standing upon the sandhills facing the vanishing glory, he started and brushed a hand across his eyes.

"Thought I saw Mum," he muttered; sighed and plodded on.

Then the woman lifted her arms slowly with the old gesture he remembered and her poor dress fluttered softly out behind. She seemed to be floating in the airy sea of gold, as though nature had enveloped her and at last made her one with itself.

A tremor rippled gently through the man.

"It is Mum!" he whispered. "It is Mum. It's Mum come home!"

His head lifted straight and his hands wavered towards her, impelled by a thrill of simple gladness

amazing to himself even at the moment. He essayed a little ambling run. She heard him and turned. She reached out to him and with a queer ache at his heart he saw that her face was happy—happy.

"I had to come back to the sunsets, dad," she said. "I can never leave the sunsets."

There was a touch of calloused hands falling away at once. There was one little moment eye to eye and then both turned again to the sunset, the man mechanically, unseeing, his head bowed in a thankfulness that would never become articulate, the woman with a new serenity that told of a soul at peace.

Rough voices rasped their way across from the mill and the drying-out paddocks; the gruff singing of one of their girls came to them from behind. The last roseate flush of the heavens departed, and the sea settled down like glass.

Then she turned to the path which led to their home and the man ambled along behind her, behind the woman he had never before thought his. He did not understand. He did not pretend to himself that he understood. But somehow he knew that life had simplified itself for her; that somehow the spirit of unrest within her had quietened and put away the need and reason for his sacrifice.

No words, he had, no expression. He could only feel that into the fabric of his life had crept a softer, fuller, deeper note; an essence that emanated

from his wife and somehow had been drawn out of her by the sunsets. The note crept into him with a secret gladness as life creeps into the growing things in spring. It was as though she were an organ from which the hand of nature had drawn a divine and tranquil melody of peace.

No words he had, no expression, but following her those few steps to their home he knew some wonderful moments, some glorious moments, though she had spoken no more to him and all he had said was : " Mum ! "

TUI WITH ADDED YEARS

The Marlborough Sounds were made to be pleasure grounds for lovers. There is nothing awesome or grand about their beauty ; nothing to daunt the beholder or reduce the amenities of civilized life to a position of insignificance. Not there but to the Southern Sounds of the West Coast must the tourist go for the feel of gigantic forces in nature ; for the massive and the sublime, for the glacier-carved steeps sombrely uprising from black and red waters gruesomely deep.

The Marlborough Sounds of New Zealand know no frowns, no furies, and hardly any dignity. They are subdued in a delicate, fairy-like, smiling way. Their long, indented stretches of secluded water are exquisite in their beauty ; their grotesque, funny little islands and peninsulas tickle the flat of the tides with swinging, downhanging bush. The tiny rills curvetting down the gentle slopes gurgle and whisper coquettishly of the parent hills and mountains whose arms they have escaped.

The Marlborough Sounds are softly, modestly, intimately appealing. Oh, yes, they were made for lovers. For dreaming, for the holiday time of life,

for the finding of the sweets and the discarding of the bitter. Their multitude of sheltered arms were made to encourage embraces; their patches of bush and lovely shrubs beckon with tolerant shelter. For the days and nights of the young they are Eden—for modern Adams and Eves.

In the Marlborough Sounds in the summer time the apples hang heavy and tempting. In one particular corner they are getting disconcertingly red.

It is an Accommodation House on Pelorus Sound at which Mrs. Haver and her daughter Tui are paying guests for the summer months. The hotel is crowded. Guests sleep on improvised couches in the sitting-rooms, on the broad verandas. It has its usual quota of wealthy guests from England and America, but mostly the guests are New Zealanders.

Tui Haver constantly informed her mother that she was having the time of her life. It was her first visit to the Marlborough Sounds and she was finding them ideally suited to her volatile and happy youth.

"You know, Mother," she told Mrs. Haver one morning when the two were seated on the veranda after a week's sojourn on Pelorus, "The Southern Sounds are the place for sight-seeing. Of course they're the most wonderful country in the world. I give in they're majestic and all that, but this is the place to come to play in and be happy. One couldn't be happy in the face of Milford Sound,

Mitre Peak and all that. They send shivers up one's spine; made me feel—er—religious—. You know what I mean, don't you, Mother?"

"Yes, I know what you mean, Tui. I quite understand. They're too big for your youth. That is it. They make you serious-minded. I can imagine that for people who have done great things, for men and women who have conquered worlds, or for deeply religious folk, the Southern Sounds would be like manna to the soul. But ordinary folk like us, Tui, who just drift along amusing ourselves, we feel rather out of it. Perhaps it pricks our conscience. But most likely it hurts our vanity and conceit by baring our good-for-nothingness to ourselves." Mrs. Haver ruminated.

Tui glanced at her, a little astonished. She thought that her mother was beginning to look a bit old. Not lined in the face, nor grey of hair, nor less upright or anything, but just a vague general tone about her of the beginnings of age. Oh, well, Tui thought, one could not be young for ever. She was twenty-one, her mother forty. She wondered again, as she had often wondered before, why her mother had not married again. There had been chances, Tui knew. She shrugged the thought away as being none of her business and said:

"Oh, well, Mother, we've only got one life to live. Why shouldn't we just amuse ourselves? What else is there to do anyhow? This will do

me. Gee! There's Mr. Brett's launch put out from his cove! He'll be here for tennis this morning." She whooped with delight and rushed off to join a party of youngsters like herself, en route for the beach.

Mrs. Haver looked after her, thinking how pretty she was, among other things. Then she watched the distant launch come swiftly up the Sound, coming from one of the myriad tiny coves on the shore of which Louis Brett, yachtsman, sportsman, was camping. Her brows gathered in a frown, her lips clamped together, but soon these stormy signs departed and she continued looking out over the Sound with unfathomable eyes. She was astonishingly like her daughter, a mellowed, quiet, experienced Tui.

Brett's big de luxe launch grounded on the white sand and he leapt ashore to be engulfed in a hoydenish crowd. His big figure, sloppily dressed in dirty cream flannels, towered above the girls; his pleasant, quiet features were easily discernible by Mrs. Haver on the veranda. He was so brown that strangers often took him for a Maori.

Young men gathered about him, coming from out of the bush, down from the gently sloping hills, and soon there was a general bolt for the tennis and croquet lawns. The merry laughter, boisterous, good-natured wrangling and popping of balls came through the shrubs to Mrs. Haver, now joined by other ladies on the veranda.

Mrs. Haver liked to play tennis too. In fact, she played exceedingly well. During the first week she and Brett had demonstrated that they were easily the best players in the house. He had looked for her every day on the courts. But one day Mrs. Haver developed a trifling indisposition and thereafter kept away from tennis. For one or two days Brett asked for her and then apparently forgot her. Tui, although not so good with the racquet as her mother, obviously had compensatory charms for Brett.

By and by it got too hot for play and the crowd of players came trooping around the house to idle about till lunch time. They fell on the grassy lawns in the shade of the trees, on the cool boards of the veranda, sheltered from the sun. Tui sprawled down beside her mother.

"I'll just cool off a bit and then dive into the briny," she said. "Come for a swim, Mother. Feel all right now, don't you?"

"Yes, all right," Mrs. Haver answered absently. Her eyes were on a group across the lawn. There was a water tap there with a hose attached and Brett was threatening to turn a stream onto several girls who joked about him. Tui's eyes followed her mother's and became serious. She sat up abruptly and drew closer.

"I say, Mum," she began uncertainly. "You know, I never intended to get married, but—He'd be a good catch, wouldn't he?" She nodded to-

wards Brett. Her mother's eyes came down to her steadily.

"Yes, a good catch. Do you love him, Tui?"

"Oh, I don't know about that." Tui went red. She grew uncomfortable and kicked the gravel about the path. "Gee! I suppose I do, Mother. I don't know. But that's not the point, is it? Not nowadays. I always said I wouldn't be tied down to any man, but——. Well, he likes me. Anyone can see that. Here he comes now. I could have a good time." She rose.

"Tui!" said her mother hurriedly. "You have a good time now. Love does matter. It isn't the big thing, of course. Comfort's the big thing, but it matters. We've got enough money. Leave him to a woman who might love him." She was white. There were drops like dew on her forehead.

But Tui did not notice. She was watching Brett. She laughed.

"Oh, I love him, Mother. Well enough, anyhow, for the twentieth century. Love is old-fashioned now. He's pretty good to look at, isn't he?" Her mother rose and walked indoors as the man approached. As she climbed the stairs to the room she shared with Tui she muttered:

"She is right. Love is old-fashioned. Ah, well——."

Mrs. Haver lay about and rested a good deal during the following days. She was assured by Tui that Brett was definitely courting her, she was

sure. Tui was a little aggrieved at her mother's lack of interest in the matter.

"What's the matter with you, Mother?" she asked impatiently one day. "You've always been mighty particular about my boys before. You say you're not ill and you don't look ill, yet you're always moping and don't seem to give a damn if I have Lou Brett or not."

"Tui, you are a woman now, a woman grown. You are twenty-one. You are a woman like myself—. I can't be always babying you. Look out for yourself and don't bother me so much. I'll put no obstacle in your way. I know the man is all right. It never seems to strike you that I might have affairs of my own to engross me."

Tui marvelled openly. She stared at her mother, lying on her bed, then said:

"You've never had affairs before that I knew nothing about. But I don't want to bother you. I can take care of myself all right. Sorry I spoke. Thought you would be interested to know about Lou, that's all." Her mother flung around to her at that.

"Has he said anything definite to you?"

"No-o." Tui's mouth dimpled. "But he would if I'd let him." She sat on the windowsill, swung one foot and laughed. "I'm in no hurry. There are other nice boys beside him. And it doesn't do to fall into their laps. He'll talk when I want him to." She hopped over to the bed,

kissed her mother and said: "Now, old dear, get up and come for a swim. You'll get old, moping around like this. Have a look out of the window at the sparkle on the water and you won't resist it. I can see Lou's launch coming up. He is going to run me around to Queen Charlotte Sound this afternoon. Will you come?"

"No!" said her mother, so forcibly that Tui was taken aback.

"What on earth's the matter with you?" she demanded. "Oh, well, don't come then. If you want to be nasty there's nothing easier." She walked to the mirror and began stripping herself of her clothes. A simple process; one thin silk dress, one filmy silk and lace petticoat, and one step-in to tumble down. Then her shoes and stockings to be flung off. Her mother watched her pull on the tight bathing-suit which showed off her figure enchantingly. Soon she was off with a brief: "So-long."

Mrs. Haver sat up abruptly, slipped off the bed, walked to the window and looked out onto the sparkling waters as Tui had bidden her, then stepped to the mirror and peered closely in at her face. The face she saw was sombre, tight-lipped. She loosened it with a smile. Now the vision was good to see. A long minute she gazed and then she also began to disrobe, swiftly. Naked, she turned herself about before the mirror, eyeing her image critically. It was Tui's body over again, except

for a slight, a very slight thickness about the hips and spoiled breast contours. That, she reflected, was the result of nursing her one baby. Rather strange they had never recovered their shape in all these years. But they were not pendulous by any means. She seemed fairly satisfied by what she saw. Then she dived into her trunk for a certain bathing suit. Her usual one, a new, fantastic affair, lay over a chair back. But Mrs. Haver fished out an old shabby, one-piece suit which had plainly done yeoman's service. When she drew it on there were noticeable holes in the body-piece of it. It had no legs and was so tight she found it difficult to button it over the shoulders. As she stared at her reflection now a devil-may-care sparkle came to the eyes which had lately been so dull. She smiled grimly. Then she caught up her beach gown, drew it around her and stalked from the room.

About three hundred yards off shore a launch belonging to one of the guests was moored and when Mrs. Haver arrived at the beach three men were fishing from it, clad in singlet and pyjama pants. She slipped into the water some distance away from Tui's squalling bunch and struck out for this launch. The water was like the face of a mirror and almost tepid. A mild exhilaration took possession of Mrs. Haver. She used cleanly slow over-arm strokes, with her face under water. Tui said she swam like a man. Very quietly she climbed on to the launch on the offside from the fishermen.

She squatted down beside them without a word.

By and by two swimmers detached themselves from the group inshore and swam out also. At once Mrs. Haver knew them to be Tui and Brett. They were close to the launch when Tui suddenly raised herself high out of the water and shouted :

" Why, it's Mother ! Hallo ! How did you get here ? Thought you were in bed."

" Here ! How do you expect us to catch fish with you all scrambling around in the water ? Get out ! " yelled a fisherman. No notice was vouchsafed him at all. Tui sprang on board from off Brett's shoulders, shoving him under with the force of her jump. She fell on the deck with a shriek of laughter, then hopped up quickly and turned to help him aboard.

From behind drooping lids Mrs. Haver watched them quietly. Her lips were apart, showing her perfect natural teeth. (Tui had several false ones). There was just now a flush on her cheeks for some reason or other. She had no cap on and her wet, dark-brown hair streamed down around her, gleaming here and there with red lights in the caress of the sun. Tui gazed on her in half-smiling, half-frowning bewilderment.

" Why, Mother, you will spoil your hair," she reproved, and her eyes plainly disapproved her mother's costume. Brett took no notice of the older woman at all beyond a pleasant :

" How-do, Mrs. Haver ? Great weather, aye ? "

He sprawled out on the white deck and Tui sat on him, finding the boards too hot, she said. Now and again her eyes shot wondering glances at her mother.

Mrs. Haver soon rose, stretched herself and prepared to dive in. Brett's head turned and surveyed her slim, poised figure. After the small splash Tui said confidentially :

"I can't imagine what's come over Mother. She's been so funny lately. I wonder why she put on that old suit ?" Brett yawned and played with her bare arm. Plainly he was not interested in "Mother."

Mrs. Haver swam inshore and lay on the sands with the other swimmers, now tired of the water. If Brett were unappreciative other men were not ; even quite young men. Tui was easily the belle of the house party, but in Tui's absence her mother took first place. Not that either were beautiful. But how many women are ? They were charming and vital and pretty ; fully sexed, that is all, and that " all " is scarce enough. Two young men gave instant and unstinted recognition to the impeachments of Mrs. Haver's costume and manner when she threw herself negligently upon the sand. They neglected the younger women to amuse her with their tomfoolery. They pressed her to smoke, which she did ; fought whimsically over the possession of her favours. When Tui and Brett arrived ashore Mrs. Haver was laughing heartily, seemingly enjoying herself immensely.

" Look at Mother," said Tui to Brett. " She is

like a young girl." Brett looked, for quite a long time, then said :

" Perhaps she feels like one. She looks very young. How old is she, Tui ? "

" Forty."

" Oh, is that all. She is young, then." Tui looked astonished.

" Young ! " she exclaimed. " Young at forty ! My goodness ! Seems as old as Methuselah to me."

He looked down at her, gravely.

" How old do you think I am, Tui ? "

" Oh, you are different. You are a man. Years don't count with a man. A man is as old as he feels——" She stopped, laughing.

" And a woman is as old as she looks," he finished. " Your mother looks about five years older than you, my dear little Tui." They walked over to Mrs. Haver and sat down. The older woman lit another cigarette. She became almost feverishly excited. Her eyes flashed coquettishly, her whole aspect became that of an amorette. The young men became bold. Tui's face reddened. She stared at her mother angrily. She rose.

" Come on, Mother," she said, with a slight accent on the " Mother." " It must be near lunch-time. Time we were dressed."

" I'll be along soon. You run along," said Mrs. Haver. Tui, obviously disgusted, hurried away. Brett sat on, looking seawards, his hands clasped round his drawn-up knees. His face

was inscrutable. Mrs. Haver suddenly sat up.

"Run away, you youngsters," she said. "I'm tired now. Too much excitement isn't good for me at my age." Brett glanced sideways at her. She caught the glance. She rose and stood flopping her hair back and forth to get the sand out of it.

"Your age!" one young man scoffed. "Why, you're a mere chicken" She laughed and glanced at Brett.

"A chicken, aye. An old hen, my dear. I'm forty. How old are you, Mr. Brett?"

"I'm forty, too," he answered briefly.

"I thought you would be as old as me. You look it," she said critically. "We're a couple of old birds, then. Just throw my gown around me, will you?" He rose, picked up her gown and threw it around her, standing behind her. She smiled mischievously up at him, over her shoulder.

"Do you feel old? I don't. I don't feel a day older than I did at sixteen."

"And you don't look it," he answered gallantly. A spark of something, not mischievous, shot from her eyes and struck his. Struck a response, too, she saw. His hand was resting on her arm. It tightened for an instant, less than an instant, then it dropped off and he turned away.

"You are remarkably like your daughter," he said coldly. "I'll have to dress too. I'm taking Tui out in the launch this afternoon."

"Yes, so she said," she answered indifferently.

They began to walk towards the house, through the shrubs. As they crossed the lawn he turned to her with a strange expression in his eyes.

"Yes, I'm forty, Mrs. Haver, like yourself. Do you think I'm too old for Tui?" His eyes looked her up and down. They stepped onto the veranda. Mrs. Haver bowed mockingly.

"My dear man," she drawled. "You're forty, I'm forty, but I am really quite as young as Tui. Why shouldn't you be? I think you would make an ideal husband for—Tui." She laughed, and, whisking off her gown, ran indoors. He heard her singing as she raced up the stairs; heard it cease as she gained her room. He had an impression of white clean legs as she vanished. Not a trace of swollen veins. She and Tui were the only clean-legged women there. He knew that. Funny that almost all New Zealand women, and men too, seemed to have varicose veins. Hard to see one on the beaches without them. Brett looked down at his own muscular nether limbs. Just below one knee, at the back, there lay a thick rope. He blamed it onto football in his early days.

Tui, dressed, was sulkily awaiting her mother. She made a horrified sound as Mrs. Haver came in trailing her robe.

"Mother! Did you come through the house like that? What ever will the women here think of you?"

"None saw me, Tui. But what matter if they

did? Why this prudery all of a sudden?" She lay back on the bed comfortably. Tui's eyes stormed.

"Prudery! It's not prudery, it's—decency! And it's not all of a sudden, either! You taught it to me yourself! What's come over you to-day? Carrying on with those boys on the beach as though you were a girl, and a not too particular girl at that. I was ashamed! And before Lou Brett, too! What would he think of you?"

"Mr. Brett's opinions are of no moment to me, Tui," was the curt answer. "Do you begrudge me what fun I can get out of life?"

"I begrudge you nothing and you know it. I can't understand you." Tui was almost in tears. "But that's not pleasure to you, Mother, surely. You're my Mother! My Mother! It stands to reason I want men to respect you. And why now? You have never been like this before. Where's the skirt you used to wear with that suit? And why didn't you put your good one on?"

"Don't harp so much on the mother part of it, Tui, dear." Her mother spoke slowly, her eyes on the ceiling. "I am another woman, Tui, now, as well as being your mother. When you are twenty years older, Tui, you might understand. I am in the full summer of life, Tui. Perhaps it has suddenly struck me that my life is going over and I have not made the best of it. Perhaps I am in the Indian Summer of my life, Tui. Perhaps I would like to marry again——"

"Well, that's all right. You've a perfect right to. That's no reason why you should behave like a light——"

"Tui, mind your own business! You know nothing of my needs and desires. A woman at my time of life must sometimes employ strange weapons."

"Your time of life! Anyone would think you were a grandmother! Why, Lou Brett said this morning that you looked only five years older than me!"

Again there came a little flash of feeling leaping to Mrs. Haver's eyes.

"Did he? Did he? This morning! He said it this morning, Tui! He didn't say it yesterday or the day before! This morning! And why? Do you get that, Tui?" The girl's reply was a mortified:

"Oh, Mother!" She sat disconsolately for a while and then added lugubriously: "I wish Father hadn't died."

"I don't!" No hesitation about that. "I don't!" Another silence, then from Tui, this time curiously:

"Was he very bad, Mother?"

"He was a libertine, Tui. A profligate."

The luncheon gong beat loudly and long, calling wanderers in from the bush, from the water.

"Better get up, Mother, and dress." All Tui's rancour was gone. She kissed her mother and

undid the fastenings of the suit she disapproved of.

That night Mrs. Haver went to the ballroom with Tui and danced. She could not jazz, had not danced, in fact, for years, but when Brett asked her to waltz she got up and found her feet as nimble as ever. She was vivacious. He was nicely cordial. He paid unremitting attention to Tui, and when Mrs. Haver went upstairs she caught a glimpse of the two passing out of the front door into the night.

It was a strained and desolate face that looked back at Mrs. Haver from her mirror a few minutes later. It was a tired body that fell beside the bed and gave vent to choking sobs. It was a sore heart and shamed mind that strove to master primitive instincts and take kindly or at least tolerantly to a condition which was a torment and a distraction to her. Her body was hot, her brain fevered. She wanted the cool. She rose from her knees and pulled aside the window curtains.

Out there the Sound was glamorous. Its centre was a broad white streak cradled in the shadows cast by gentle slopes. It was night at its serenest. It was Nature taking rest. Up from the shrubbery and lawns below came smoke and noisy laughter. The young people were in the grounds, out on the beach, though the music still went on downstairs. Not only the young people. Lou Brett, forty, was there also.

Mrs. Haver thought suddenly that she would go for a swim. It would do her good. It would cool

her body. How stupid to dance in the summer when one could swim! She put on her suit, the new, fantastic affair this time, threw her robe around her and went out. As she left the veranda, in the full glare of the light streaming out, Tui's voice came exclaiming from the shadows:

"Why, there's Mother going for a swim! Hey, Mother!" Mrs. Haver waited while the girl and her companion came up to her. "That's a great idea! I'm sick of dancing. We'll go too, ay, Lou?"

Mrs. Haver noted the "Lou." She knew it was the first one.

"All right," his deep voice answered. "My suit is on the boat."

"Won't take me long to change. You go on." Tui was off like a shot, calling to others about. Brett and Mrs. Haver walked down to the beach. She did not speak. He hummed a tune. She thought he seemed happy. At the beach he said:

"I won't be long. You pop in the water," and took off his shoes to wade the few steps out to his launch. Mrs. Haver walked in up to her knees and took a shallow dive. The man was in with her in a minute. Mrs. Haver turned over and floated on her back.

"I feel like floating away out; right down the Sound and out into the Straits," she said to Brett. "Isn't this a Paradise of a place?" He took a stroke nearer her, turned on his back and also floated.

"Yes, it's a Paradise of a place all right." Mrs. Haver accidentally touched him with her side. Her arm fell out across his body, just below the surface.

"We seem curiously alone," she said.

"Yes, we do." His reply was staccato. He turned his head swiftly and looked in her face. His eyes found hers inscrutable. They were wide-open and he saw them plainly. Her mouth was open, too, lips just apart. The water lapped the bottom of her chin and made a nest for her face. She might have been Tui. Insensibly he clutched at the arm that was now pressing down on him. And Mrs. Haver snatched without scruple at the moment she knew was hers. She wondered if this had been accidental or had she brought it about somehow. She could not decide. Her eyes blazed into passion. Her other arm came round to him, caught at him and dragged him around as she slid onto her side. Their bodies pressed together; their legs became entangled, and, just above the water, resting on the flat of it, their lips met in a long, crushing kiss——

A stampede shoreward from the house and they fell apart. Fell apart and drifted without a word. A yelling crowd soon swallowed them up. Mrs. Haver swam around, swimming strongly, breathing deeply, tingling still with the pressure of his virile body against her's. She laughed intermittently, little gurgling chuckles. He did not come near her again.

Back in their room Tui wanted to chatter.

"I let Lou kiss me to-night, Mother," she said. Mrs. Haver whirled on her. Luckily Tui did not notice. She was engaged in the business of rubbing oil into her hair, which had been well salted that night.

"Did he propose to you?"

"Lord bless you, no! People don't propose nowadays, Mother. They just make love. We know when it's serious. In a few days Lou will say something about getting married some day. That's how it's done. I'm in no hurry. Once a girl is properly engaged she has to sing a bit low with the other chaps." Tui laughed a little. Evidently she liked the other chaps. Her mother regarded her critically.

"I don't believe you care whether you marry Brett or not," she said slowly.

"Well, I certainly shouldn't be down-hearted if I didn't. But he is the only one I would consider so far."

"But, Tui, my dear little girl, you've got years and years to choose a man in. Why bother at all? Brett is old enough to be your father. He is the same age as I am."

"Oh, yes, but he's a man. And he wouldn't try to boss like the young ones do. But who knows?——or cares? I'm tired now, Mother. There's a whole lovely day to-morrow not touched yet." She yawned charmingly.

Tui's few false teeth were responsible for the next

move in the game. Or perhaps it would be truer to say that Tui's false teeth were responsible for the form the next move took. She broke her plate. While scouring it vigorously next morning she dropped it in the porcelain handbasin and—there was Tui's plate, in two exact halves. And there was Tui minus both eyeteeth and one or two back ones. She took it rather like a brick. A few swear words, of course, expressing mortification and despair, but no anger.

"Well, that is hard luck," said Mrs. Haver from her bed. She was lying in this morning. "Can't we glue them together somehow?" Tui looked dolefully on the pieces in her hand.

"I'm afraid it's the dentist, Mother. And the dentist means Nelson or Wellington. Just when I was having such a splendid time, too! Oh, rotten! Lou was to be here at ten and we were going launching for the day." She spread her mouth wide before the glass.

"You don't look so bad," encouraged her mother. "This is steamer day for Nelson. Send them by post."

"And go out like this. No, thank you, Mother mine. I wish I had your teeth."

"You would have just as good if you had taken my advice and not eaten so much rubbish."

"Now, Mother, that's not fair. It's the water. You know it's the water that rots all our teeth in this country."

"The water is a good excuse, anyhow. It

hasn't rotted mine and I never went thirsty. But what are you going to do ? "

" Catch the steamer. What else ? It's rotten, but I'll have to go. You tell Lou when he comes. Tell him the truth. It's eight o'clock now. The steamer lays out at nine. I'll get one of the boys to run me out in the launch."

" Would you like me to go with you ? " Her mother was game.

" Oh, no. Not unless you would like to come. You stay and tell Lou."

" All right."

Mrs. Haver wandered down onto the beach as soon as she saw Brett's launch coming up the Sound. In five minutes he had grounded. He saw her and perceptibly stiffened, lifted his hat formally, jumped ashore and began to walk towards the house without a word for her. His mouth was tight-lipped, his face stern. All the same it was slightly flushed.

Mrs. Haver's demeanour was her usual one. She called :

" Are you after Tui, Mr. Brett ? " He wheeled alertly and gave her a stiff : " Yes."

" She has gone to Nelson. Come over here. I can't shout out private business." She spoke impatiently. " Neither will I eat you." He walked over, disconcerted ; Mrs. Haver knew, more by her attitude than by her news. He was also vastly surprised and suspicious.

"What! Gone to Nelson!"

She told him why, adding: "Tui said I was to tell you the truth."

"When will she be back?" he asked abruptly.

"Can't say, really. Probably the day after tomorrow. Next boat." She took up her book, lay back on the sands and started to read. He looked down on her, frowning. Mrs. Haver knew she looked very well and very young. He moved pettishly, cleared his throat as though to say something, then turned and made for his launch. He pushed it off the shingle, wading to his knees, jumped aboard and as he moved off sang out:

"I'll be back when Tui is. Good-bye." She waved an arm.

But when he was far out she laid her head on her book and wept quietly. For shame, for grief, for her broken hopes and love. Nothing more to it, then! He would be back when Tui was. Her own daughter, too, her own dear little one! Well, there had been something—that clinging, crushing kiss, pungent with the tang of the sea, poignant with sudden, flaming passion. It had been a big moment to her, the biggest in her life so far. A lambent flash of heart-flame, instantly buried in the wash of the sea. She felt again the surge of his body to hers, a surge that bespoke a virility she had never yet known. The desire of maturest womanhood seemed seethed in her veins and its exquisite torment forced Mrs. Haver's thoughts to adventure in

depths of determination she had hitherto not verged on nor dreamt of.

All that day she wandered from point to point, reckless of body but more so of mind. She was full of aimless irritation, of sensual goadings, of shame and lacerated self-respect. It was evening before her desires cast scruples behind her. But once her passional scrambling crystallized into a definite purpose her mind worked quickly and lucidly. In less than five minutes from the focussing of it she had decided on the ways and means.

Brett's camp was some two miles down the Sound. The tiny cove wherein it was pitched was hidden from the view of the Accommodation House by a spur of land. About half a mile back from this spur there was a homestead, a poultry and pig farm, with the products of which the Accommodation House was supplied. Mrs. Haver and Tui, with others, had visited this homestead, reaching it by a path running back from a tiny jetty on the inside of the spur. Before Mrs. Haver went to bed that night she had arranged to be landed at that jetty before nine o'clock the next morning—in order to visit the homesteaders.

Between the snatches of half-sleep she got the affair seemed grotesque, impossible. What ever had possessed her to conceive such a scheme! She would have to be "ill" in the morning, since the launch was arranged for; or else really visit the homestead. Yes, she could do that. Better that

than hang around the house all day. As she tossed on her pillow she thought she really was getting ill, she was so hot.

But with the morning freshness, her fever subsided, and the fearful images of the dark escaped her. Her plan was shorn of its novelty now, too, and seemed practicable and legitimate.

She pondered on what she would wear. She had not many pretty clothes with her. Dainty frocking was not for holiday-making, for boating, and bush. She thought of a nice, frilly little cream frock of Tui's; she would wear that, and Tui's broad cream straw hat with the red roses under the brim. She reddened her lips too, and rubbed plenty of cream into her face. She did not want to burn and the day promised to be exceedingly hot.

She was standing on the jetty with the launch rapidly receding before she thought of the shrubs she would have to scramble through to get to the camp. And also at the same time it occurred to her that Brett might have gone fishing or at that moment be preparing to go. The dismay in regard to her frock was dissolved in fear. She plunged into the manuka with her skirt folded round her waist.

It was not so bad. In half an hour she had crossed the back of the spur and was looking down on the camp from its other slope. Her first rapid glance told her that Brett was still there. She could see his big form bending over a small fire outside the tent. There was a frying pan in his hand, at the contents

of which he jabbed with a fork. Mrs. Haver sighed with relief, then began to tremble with nervous fright. She let down her skirt. Her toilet had suffered little harm. She took in the details of his camp; a tent, a table outside, standing under a totara tree, a stretcher bed (evidently he had slept outside), some oars lying about and some articles of clothing. As she watched, he tipped the contents of the pan on to a plate, sat down at the table on a box, and began to eat.

Mrs. Haver was in a quandary. Now that the time to do it had arrived it was very hard to walk down there and tell him that she had come to spend the day with him. She sat down miserably, thinking she would never pluck up courage enough. She imagined him turning nasty, saying all sorts of horrid things.

He finished his late breakfast, stood up, stretched himself, then took his table tools and plate down to the water and washed them. Putting them to dry on the grass he lay down beside them and pulled his slouch hat over his face. Mrs. Haver had just decided to sneak down when she was startled into violent action and a scream by a loud "moo-o-o" close to one side of her. A wandering cow had risen from sleep. Its cry was too much for Mrs. Haver's nervous condition. She yelled and almost bounced down the slope, tripping over small bushes.

Brett sprang to his feet and ran towards her. He

stopped dead when he recognized her. She ran behind him and gasped :

" What was that ? " He turned round.

" A cow. It won't hurt you. Where did you come from ? " She heaved a heavy sigh, not sorry now to have had her entry forced, and collected herself.

" Where do you think I have come from, silly ? The Accommodation House, of course. I was going to visit the farmer back yonder with some of the girls but their chatter bored me so I left them and came over here." She brushed at her skirt and looked bad-tempered. " I'll go fishing with you if you're going. I feel like a quiet day on the water. Get me a cup of tea, will you ? I feel a bit upset after that fright." He fingered his chin and stared hard at her. Mrs. Haver took off her hat and fanned her face. " Whew ! " she said. " It is hot ! " He turned his head abruptly, frowning.

" I was going out by and by," he said shortly. " Suppose I'd better get you a cup of tea. Sit down." He waved towards the bed and walked to his primitive fireplace. His manner became cool and impersonal, the manner of a man to a man he did not much care for.

Mrs. Haver's spirits rose and soared. She had got in anyway. She began to chatter blithely ; about the camp, the cow, the Sound, and Tui. She compelled the same artless charm into her manner as she knew her appearance held. There

might have been no moonlit night and stolen kiss in the sea. She knew he was not entirely at ease but she certainly managed to make him think she was. When he brought her a cup of tea he asked casually if she had heard from Tui.

"Heard from her! How could I have heard from her? She would not arrive at Nelson until five o'clock last night."

"Thought she might have wired you."

"Oh no." Her tone was a trifle sarcastic now. "Tui will not wire me. Why should she? She is a woman, just another woman, and will not give a thought to me. Unless she wants something."

"You're hardly fair, are you?" He was distant, cold. "My impression is that Tui thinks of you all the time. She seemed to me to be a particularly loving and dutiful daughter."

"Tui, Mr. Brett,"—Mrs. Haver was just as distant and cool as himself, and slightly contemptuous—"Tui is the product of my upbringing. Like mother, like daughter, you know." He turned his back on her and lit a cigarette, then busied himself with his fishing tackle.

Subtly Mrs. Haver knew he was perturbed about her presence, still suspicious, and she set herself to make him easy. She hummed a tune, then said straightly, with a motherly air:

"You intend, I presume, to ask Tui to marry you, Mr. Brett?"

"Yes." Very gruffly. "Any objection?"

" None at all."

He, after a while :

" Will she marry me, do you think ? "

" Yes, I think she will. She said she would." He straightened up from the rope he was coiling, and looked out over the Sound. So did Mrs. Haver—in a different direction. He glanced at her out of a corner of an eye. She glanced at him. Each caught the other spying. A dull red spread swiftly over the man's face. He stooped again. Mrs. Haver saw the red, though she was looking the other way. She said negligently :

" How about lunch ? What have you got to eat ? "

" Not much, to be frank. I don't worry about fancy eats. I intended to get some grub from your house yesterday but forgot. There's some bread and butter. We can run a stick through a fish and grill it. Best tucker in the world."

" Grill it on board ! How ? "

" On board, no. We can land somewhere."

" Oh, I see." Then, as he looked swiftly at her : " Food doesn't worry me, anyhow. I want to be quiet to-day."

They were borne swiftly out on the water by the chugging launch. They fished ; he at one end of the boat, she at the other. But soon Mrs. Haver grew drowsy in the heat and subsided on the stern seat. All day was before her. His mind had to be eased. Soon she pulled in her line and

huddled up in the bottom of the boat with her head on her arms on the seat.

Brett caught plenty of fish ; blue cod, schnapper and butter fish. He would send them across to Wellington to his friends with the steamer that night. Often he glanced at the woman drowsing. The launch drifted with the tide ; backed up slowly to a wooded shore. At last Brett tossed his line down too, and lay idly on the white boards of the cabin top.

The strong pure melody of the tui came from the woodlands, startlingly loud, interspersed with his cantankerous, irritating screech. The long-drawn rapturous notes of the bell-bird, not at all bell-like now, enthralled him. Brett, man of money, of yachting and shooting fame, was in his element here. This was the life ! A lazy life but glorious. A lovely bit of shoreline drifted past. A white beach a few feet wide, a narrow stretch of grassland running into the undergrowth of rimu and birch. Titoki, with its scarlet berries, caught the eye. Clematis fluffs and convolvulus scrambled over the shrubs. And of a sudden a deer flashed into view from out the undergrowth. The head of another showed over its flanks. It saw the launch, threw up its head with an indescribably swift wild movement, then wheeled and was gone.

The sun beat down on Brett and softened him to a glimmer of sensuality. Soapy bubbles on top of the water turned to rainbow shimmers ; the patient

glide of the boat, imperceptible but for the drift of the shore, induced in him a somnolence of mind. The eye he turned to the woman had now no distrust, no hardness. She lay still. Her hat shielded her face. Was she asleep? He thought so. A school of porpoises rose out of the depths far out over the water and began to play; a common enough sight in the Sounds but still not so common that Brett did not desire the woman to see it. He called to her. She answered a sleepy: "Ay?" then stirred and lifted her head.

"Have a look at the sea porpoises bowling along, Mrs. Haver."

"What! Porpoises! Oh, how lovely! What a treat! It was worth coming just for this!—— But where are we? We weren't here when I went to sleep."

"The boat drifted. Feeling hungry? There, they have slipped under. They won't come out again for a while. We had better go ashore here and cook a fish." He set-to and started the engine and they ran inshore.

"My goodness, I can't get off. You'll have to carry me, Mr. Brett. You'll have to carry me!" She sang the declaration. She could not help it. The time, the place, the companionship, was to her heavenly. And the difference in the man, his lulled suspicions and softening, she had apprehended at once.

"Righto." He jumped out with a rope in one

hand and held the other arm out for her to sit on. She planted herself firmly. He dropped her on the sand and coiled the rope around a tough shrub just off the beach. The grass was long and tough, like wire in places. He pulled some of it to make a fire on the earth, for flames spread easily. He began to talk.

"Think Tui would want to settle down? Think she would want to stick to the towns?"

"No. Tui and I have the same tastes. I like the town in the winter but the summer is for the wild places. Tui is like that. She and I have often said we would learn to shoot and go hunting. There are wild pigs and goats here, aren't there?" Mrs. Haver poked round for dry sticks for the fire.

"Yes, any God's amount of them back on the hills. I'll take you and Tui out for a day when she comes back if you like. Didn't think you would care for that sort of thing. It is pretty hard going, you know. We might get a pig. I wouldn't take goats in summer."

"Why?" Mrs. Haver came towards him with an armful of sticks. At the "any God's amount" she glanced swiftly at him and realized that he was unconsciously shedding his culture under the influence of the bush. She rejoiced. It gave her a chance. She realized also that this glimpse of the man in his element was deepening her love for him. If she failed it was "all up" with her. She threw

down the sticks and watched him pad down the loose earth with his foot.

"Why! Because it would be slaughter for nothing. One doesn't eat goat. At least, I don't, and their skins are no good in summer." He went back to the boat and brought out a spirit lamp and kettle; a teapot, cups and things, in a basket. Soon the lamp was burning merrily; the blue cod was sizzling over the hot coals and wrinkling their noses with its delicious smell.

Mrs. Haver's primitive mood became a very real thing. She wandered about the edges of the bush, peering in at its depths, gazing up at the graceful sweep of the rimu boughs and the red tinges of the birch leaves, and now and again glancing to the squatting figure at the fire. He had discarded hat and coat and was whistling pleasantly the latest jazz tune. The tune jarred on Mrs. Haver.

"Don't whistle that thing, Mr. Brett," she called. "It is out of place here."

"Ay? All right. Come on. The fish is cooked. Bet you've never tasted anything like it in your life." He had put a broad green leaf on each plate; on each leaf he put half a fish and gave her one.

"Help yourself to bread and butter. Salt and pepper in that fixture there." They ate silently, their plates held in the best manner possible. Suddenly Mrs. Haver said:

"I should like to spend all my days like this.

These are the happiest hours of my life." Her tone was solemn for all her happiness.

" I'm glad you like it," he said heartily.

After the meal he lay down on the grass.

" Don't want any more fish. No hurry to move." He shaded his eyes with his hat.

Mrs. Haver came round to his side of the fire, took up his plate and cup and went down to wash them with her own. Coming back she noticed that he was watching her from under his hat, and Mrs. Haver blushed.

She blushed at the thought of what she meant to do. She held her head down but there was a rapturous tingling of her senses. She thanked God for the beauty around them, for the absolute success of her manœuvre so far. She felt now within her rights. She was using the weapons of civilized woman turned primitive. She did not need now to keep telling herself of the congruity in their ages. She knew she would not be ashamed even if she failed.

She put the things in the basket and sank down in the grass not far from him, taking off her hat. But she could not compose herself comfortably. She wanted a cushion. His coat lay beside him.

" Do you mind if I use your coat for a pillow ? " she asked.

" No." She reached out for it. So did he, to hand it to her. They both grabbed it.

" Ah ! "—said Mrs. Haver, laughing tremulously.

A current of desire rushed from her. She thought it must have filled space, it was so violent, so tremendous. He snatched his hand from the coat. Alarm was all over him. He drew away from her jerkily.

But Mrs. Haver got him. In a trice she was leaning over him, her face, her whole being, radiating love. She was murmuring:

"Oh, Lou, I love you! I love you!" Her hands caressed his face, which stared up at her white and fixed. She knew in the midst of the tumult of her senses that his chivalry alone was holding him quiet. She knew he was seeing Tui's mother.

"Oh, no! Don't look like that!" she cried, and dropped her mouth on his.

Brett had no chance against her. A woman who had for fifteen years been the wife of a libertine. But when he surrendered he did so properly. He showed her what manner of man he was. Afterwards he muttered hoarsely, in the first bewilderment of reaction:

"I thought you were Tui, I did! I did! You just seemed to me to be Tui!" And Mrs. Haver, lying in the grass, triumphant, having all the emotions of the conqueror, cried out in reply:

"You fool! Oh, you fool! I am Tui! I am Tui with added years! It was me you loved, not Tui! What can a chit of a girl give you in comparison with me? You have loved me to-day!

Oh, Lou! You have loved me to-day and you will love me again! Put away the thought of Tui! She is a child! You are my age and you are my man! Come back here!"

She flung her arms out wide. She sank into the grass. The teeming fertility of the woods around, of the waters, of the earth upon which she lay, seemed passed into her slim body spread out there in the grass.

Brett was a man of the out-life, of the waters and of the bush. He looked down on her and all around. He saw how beautiful she was and ached again for the rapture of her embrace. And gradually the image of a fresh young girl he had loved faded away to where it came from; it belonged to a world of long ago, away back in the days of his youth.

"Lou!" she cried again. And this time it seemed that her voice came out of the shadows under the trees, and out of the Sound. "Lou! Come back! I will never let you go!" He dropped his head and moved back to her, stood above her and looked down.

"Well, yes, I suppose I'd better," he said. But it seemed he was thinking of something else. He had not really come back. She waited, staring up, dragging him down by her will.

MRS. SALGAST'S BABY

Golden Ridge seemed veritably to undulate in the late afternoon heat. It was a little stick of a mountain, terminating one of the innumerable small ranges that run down to the sea on the West Coast of the South Island. Its top was almost spiked. A rich but patchy gold reef was located in it, the working of which provided employment for about fifty men, whose unsightly habitations were tucked away in crannies here and there ; a precautionary measure against the wind which, when it blew, blew hard.

The clayey ground was baked and broken. The only vegetation on the Ridge was stunted manuka, all awry, its natural beauty coarsened to tough ugliness by its struggle for existence in the face of the wind. All around the spike from its top down streeled a decade's accumulation of quartz ; twice vomited, first by the mine and then by the battery. It was white, this quartz, lumpy and dangerously sharp, yet the only paths up to the Ridge were over it. The pack horses, fetching weekly supplies from the settlement twelve miles inland, the road to which dipped all the way, had to scramble up these quartz tracks the best way they could. And

the last hundred yards to the top were almost perpendicular.

So the inhabitants of the Golden Ridge settlement rarely left it to return. Especially the women. The mine was known all over New Zealand for the richness of its lode and the lack of supervision, so miners had a habit of going there and staying there for a year or two, until they had "lifted" a fair amount of gold, then leaving for good. Lack of vegetables often gave the men scurvy. (Even the settlement twelve miles down was a saw-mill through which goods only passed, the nearest supply place being forty-five miles away.) They rarely saw an egg. Their milk came out of a tin. Their meat came forty-five miles once a week, so mostly it came out of a tin, too.

Yet an artist would have loved that Golden Ridge. For never were there goodlier scenes to grace the eye. One side of the Ridge fell from head to foot abrupt and steep in a cliff four hundred feet high. Colossal, monstrous, brutal, that sheer drop, dizzying to the very birds, though its grim, Gargantuan face was veiled in curtains of softest green. And the gentle fall of the land from the cliff bottom to the sea, a distance of about two miles, upheld the welter of tropical rain forests that for their beauty and abundance have placed New Zealand in the sun. To look down on those forests from the Ridge! The pines, the matapo, the ratas, the weeping rimu, regal in its sorrow; the lianes,

the treeferns, the filmy ferns and flowers, all woven by the distant eye to a carpet befitting God.

And the edge of that green carpet was embroidered by the sea. Ocean blue, always blue, of deeper tint or lighter, the Tasman Sea stretched out, and each night bedded the sun. Just before Christmas it was glory, to look down on the blaze of rata, plentifully daubed with white. Clematis white. And the scents of the palm-lilies down by the sea were flung back by the winds to the mountain.

* * * * * *

Bob Salgast's hut of two rooms stood fifty yards back from the cliff, sheltered by a hump at its back. Level ground, bearing the only grass on the Ridge, stretched out to the cliff.

Bob was a fine young chap, good-natured and hearty, a favourite among the men; New Zealand born of English parentage, he always told an inquirer, liking that "English parentage." He was one of the few married men on the Ridge.

His wife was much of his type, pleasant as a rule, rough-mannered and rough-spoken; the ordinary woman of that way of life. Sometimes she "nagged" at Bob, as most women of her class nag at their men; sometimes the awful quiet and loneliness drove her to outbursts of hysteria, but mostly she stood the life bravely, knowing it was only a matter of a year or two, and then—Australia, for the "clean-up."

Bob did very well. He ran the battery and

handled all the gold. Besides which, he was the only man in the place with a mortar, which meant that he was kept busy in a certain dark cave crushing the stone "lifted" by his comrades. On tribute, of course. Sometimes the dull echoes of his pounding hammer issued, muffled and mysterious, from that secret cave-mouth till two o'clock in the morning.

The life was hard for Mrs. Salgast, it must be admitted. There were three other women on the Ridge and the continual tale-bearing and quarrelling provided a certain amount of interest, but still —it was hard on the four of them.

But this story is concerned with the fact that Mrs. Salgast gave birth to a child, a son, just before Christmas, one year. She and Bob had been married twelve years and had long given up hope of issue. Then along came this child. Bob thought it great, when he knew it was coming. He seemed crazy with joy and made himself the laughing-stock of the mine with his tempestuous, open rejoicing. He had a head of the loveliest light-gold curls imaginable and he would thrust his hands up into his mop and boom out:

"A youngster, Ashes, old man! A kid after all these years! Who'd have dreamt it? Aye?" This to his years-old friend and comrade, Ashley Fletcher, the manager of Golden Ridge mine.

Fletcher "boarded" with the Salgasts, sleeping in a decent little shack of his own not far away.

He had brought Bob to the Ridge, the two having contracted a deep comradeship when both were mining up at Waihi. He knew of the pilfering and the reason for Bob's interminable absences from home, but obligingly closed his eyes. He was big like Bob; fair-haired and fair-skinned like him, but there the resemblance ended. He was quiet, stable, always hesitating in manner and speech, deeply thoughtful. His eyes were steel-grey and seemed closer than they were, because of his habit of thoughtful frowning. His nose was thin, slightly pinched in at the nostrils; his lips a straight line set in square, determined jaws. He was extraordinary looking; one might even say distinguished. He was not too clever, had little formal education, yet his grit had secured him a first-class quartzmine manager's ticket.

At Salgast's impetuous outbursts on the subject of the child he would smile quietly, sometimes drop a dryly humorous remark or two in reply.

Salgast wanted his wife to go away early in her pregnancy and leave him and "Ashes" to help themselves to their meals. This course was necessary if she intended to go at all, as the way out was so rough. But Mrs. Salgast had a friend in Nelson, a professional nurse, who had often intimated her desire to have a holiday at the Golden Ridge, so she sent for this woman and stayed in her two rough rooms and had her baby. Bob knocked up a bunk in Fletcher's bach.

Now when that baby came it had black hair. Like its mother's, they said, though its mother's hair was dark-brown. Its face, like that of most new babies, was red. Its eyes were black. Bob laughed at it.

"Where the devil did it get the black eyes, Ashes?" he asked jocularly the first day. The two were outside the shack, Fletcher leaning against the wall stiffly, Bob pacing up and down before him. After a while Fletcher answered in his slow, hesitating way:

"I've heard that two very fair people often have dark children and vice versa. I knew a couple who were both dark as possible, yet all their children were red-headed."

"Oh? Aw, well, it doesn't matter. I rather like dark people myself."

But after a few days the redness departed from the baby's face and body; its features began to take form more clearly. And it was then that the first uneasiness made itself felt. The nurse began to look dubiously at it and at the mother, her friend. The mother began to stare at it, with puzzlement at first, then with strange and awful eyes. At times a wild wonder would flit across her face and she would search that of the nurse when she in her turn gazed on the baby.

At last, (the baby was a week old) the nurse, as she was washing the child in the morning said casually:

"Your parents are English, aren't they, Annie? Londoners?"

"Yes," answered Mrs. Salgast.

"And Bob is English, too, isn't he?"

"Yes." But now Mrs. Salgast was sitting up, staring at the naked baby. She swallowed several times, then whispered:

"Why, Alice? Why do you ask? You knew." The nurse sat very still for a moment looking down on the babe, then folding a towel around it quickly, she rose, brought it to the bed and uncovered it before its mother.

"My dear," she said gently. "Look at it! You'll have to face it and so will poor old Bob." Mrs. Salgast's eyes dilated. She clutched at her breast and panted. "I—I——" She tried to speak but could not and the other put in brusquely:

"It's a Maori; a regular Maori."

Mrs. Salgast threw up her hands, pawed the air with them, tried again to speak, then fell back unconscious on the pillow.

The nurse left her, sat down again and dressed the baby, muttering to herself and crying. By and by a weak voice quavered out:

"Alice, I swear I have had no Maori. I swear it."

"Oh, Annie! What's the use of lying? Here's a Maori baby. I'm thinking of poor old Bob. I wouldn't let him take it in the light these last two days; I told him it had a cold. But he's got to

know and then what will happen ?" She cried aloud. Mrs. Salgast suddenly screamed out :

" I swear I have had no Maori ! " and began to vent great choking sobs. In a few minutes she was in a fever, raving.

The nurse was distracted. Her patient might die. She ran in and out in a fever herself with anxiety. At last she noticed Fletcher entering his bach which was in full view of Salgast's place. He might help ! He might tell Bob for her. Now that the matter was broached it had better be finished and done with. She had to protect her patient. She called to Fletcher who turned and came to her at once.

" Mr. Fletcher, there's bad trouble here. This baby of Mrs. Salgast's is a Maori baby. It couldn't be noticed at first, it never can, hardly, but now it's getting a regular Maori. Mrs. Salgast has recognized it and is in a fever. She's raving. Will you tell Bob ? He's your friend. You never know what a man will do at a time like this," she finished hurriedly, wiping her face with her apron.

Not a muscle of Fletcher's face moved. At her first words his eyes went over her head in a steady stare at nothing. For a full minute he maintained a stony silence, the nurse impatiently waiting, then said briefly :

" All right. I'll tell him. I'll see him as he leaves the mine." He turned on his heel but stopped again to ask : " You're absolutely sure ? There can be no mistake ? "

"Oh, I'm sure!" she burst out. "Too damn sure!"

He returned again to the shack in half an hour to see how Mrs. Salgast was getting on. Being assured that she was quiet and sleeping he went about his work all day as usual. When the knock-off whistle blew he stood outside his place and waited for his friend to come by. Salgast came hurrying and whistling. He flung out a cheerful: "Hallo, Ashes!" as he passed. Fletcher called out:

"Bob, come here. I want you."

"Aye? Oh, all right. What's up?" Bob walked over to the manager's bach, wondering if Fletcher was going to say something about the thieving at last. He followed him indoors uneasily. He hated lying.

"Sit down, Bob. I've got bad news for you."

Concern leapt into the husband's face. "The Missis!" he cried. "She's ill!" and made for the door.

"No, she's all right. Sit down, I tell you. I've bad news for you."

"Then it's the baby! Why don't you say straight out? I'm not a kid."

"Yes, it's the baby. But it's not ill, Bob." Salgast looked blank. He sat down.

"Not ill! Then what the hell's the matter with it?" Fletcher's eyes closed for a moment, tightly, and his thin line of mouth quivered. Then he said stonily:

"There's something very much the matter with it. It's not yours, Bob. It's a—a Maori baby." He closed his eyes again, this time to hide sight of the agony of that awful realization.

Five minutes passed. Fletcher had felt impelled to turn his back. It seemed shameful to be there. There were times when a man had a right to be alone. After five minutes he said, without looking up:

"Shall I wait outside for a while, Bob?" Salgast's face, covered with the white dust of the battery, had grown so dark it seemed to be veiled in crape. Five minutes—and there were smudges beneath his eyes, the blue of which now seemed to be black. He shook his head; looked up and said hoarsely:

"So there's been a —— Maori around."

"Yes." Fletcher met his eyes squarely and held them. He would steady the other with his strength He would stop the dreadful trembling of that big body. He marvelled that those two or three words of his had wrecked a world. But suddenly Salgast leapt up, veritably leapt, and shot his two hands out at arm's length. They were great hands and as he knotted them Fletcher shivered.

"A Maori, Ashes, aye? Well, that makes it easy, Ashes, doesn't it? A Maori. That makes it easy. I'll get him! I'll get him in his dirt and pitch him over the cliff! Yes, and his bastard with him!" He whirled to the door but Fletcher

was upon him before he reached it; upon him and holding him with his superior strength.

"What are you going to do, Bob?"

"Get him! Let me go, Ashes! Let me go, or I'll—I'll—— Ashes, I've got to kill him! You can see that!"

"Kill who?" Fletcher's arms tightened round him.

"Kill who! Why, are you mad? Isn't there only one——Maori in the place?" He wrenched at the arms that encircled him.

"Listen, Bob!" Fletcher abandoned his hesitating speech and rapped the words out. "Listen to me! You think it's Tane Wetane but it mightn't be him at all. You can't tell. There might be plenty of Maori blood in the place. It gets lost for a generation and then crops out again. You'd know that if you had lived in Rotorua. I say that dark blood crops up——"

"Aw, cut it, Ashes!" But Salgast ceased to struggle and returned to his chair. For a moment only. He sprang up again and moved about jerkily. "You can't put that over me! There is a Maori here, see! Your fancy theories would be all right if there wasn't, but there is. And that Maori has been a friend of my wife's! Hasn't he? And a friend of mine, too, Holy Christ! A friend of mine! Why, I've done his gold regular for him!" Salgast laughed horribly. Neither noticed the naked disclosure of theft to the mine manager. "I've done his gold and he's done me for my

Missis. But I'll get him! And don't you try to stop me either!" He brought his fist back and menaced his friend. But Fletcher stood before the door.

"I will stop you and that's flat. Even if Tane is the man—What good will it do you to murder him? Think of your wife, man! Damn it! Think of the life in this rotten hole for a woman! The temptation! Suppose you're away at your business night after night, night after night, your wife alone in the hut. She gets hysterical—you know she gets hysterical at times with the loneliness—and then Tane—or any other man, comes along. Why, it was bound to happen! Would you kill a man for that? And get hanged yourself? You would kill your wife too." The other's lip curled.

"Some wives ought to be killed," he sneered.

"Yes, by God! And some husbands too! The kind of man that leaves his wife alone night after night in a place like this with ordinary men around her! You won't kill Tane, Bob. He's a good fellow, too. And your wife's not in a condition to be worried. She's been in a fever to-day."

"Oh, has she? And oughtn't she to be? Look here, Ashes, you're doing your best, but you can't stop me here! Why, haven't I got to do something, man? You can see that? Am I to go home and nurse his baby? And—and— Oh, those lovely black eyes, that hair like his mother's!" He tried to throw Fletcher aside.

They wrestled, at first, then fought outright. Salgast cursed frightfully but the other held his breath and vanquished him. He got him down on the floor and knelt on him. Both were blown. They glared at each other, breathing hard. Then Salgast said grimly:

"You've beaten me now, Ashes, but you can't beat me for ever. You think I'll get over it, don't you? But this is not a thing a man gets over, Ashes. It gets worse and worse the longer he thinks about it. See?"

"Well, that may be. I don't know, but it won't do you any harm to think it over for a night. I only ask you to think it over for a night, Bob. Promise me to do nothing till the morning. Just stay here. I'll go over and tell your wife—and—and see if she's got anything to say, Bob. It's only fair to see if she's got anything to say."

"The night would be hell."

"Would it be any the less hell with murder on your soul?"

"Yes! I'd have satisfaction!" He ground his teeth, audibly. "It's a Maori, Ashes! A bloody Maori! If it were only a white man! But I'll promise. It makes no difference. I'll promise to wait till morning."

Fletcher got up and went out of the bach without another word; out and over to the shack. The nurse was in the living-room preparing tea, very nervous. She jumped with fright when he stepped

through the open door, and a suppressed cry came from the bedroom. He did not notice the nurse, just walked straight through into the bedroom, but that lady dropped her frying-pan and followed him indignantly. Mrs. Salgast was crouching under the bedclothes.

"Mrs. Salgast!" Fletcher called sharply, in a rasping voice that startled the nurse. The sick woman threw the clothes back swiftly and sat up.

"You!" she cried. "Where's Bob?"

Fletcher clutched at the bed-post.

"He's over in my bach. He's taking it pretty badly. He thinks it's Tane Wetane——"

"What! What! Tane Wetane! The Maori! And me! Oh!" She screamed out the words and a queer shudder ran over the man at her tone. Then she got suddenly quiet and with her head down between her shoulders regarded him with menacing suspicion.

"Do *YOU* think it was Tane Wetane?" she asked. A flush crept over his fair skin and vanished in the thick mass of his flaxen hair.

"No-o," he answered hesitatingly. "No-o." Then he pulled himself together sharply. "But I came to ask—I came to ask, Mrs. Salgast, if you want to—keep Bob. Do you want to go on with Bob?" He glanced uneasily at the nurse who listened obstinately.

"Do I want him," the wife echoed slowly. "Do I want Bob. Well, I should say yes. Why, of

course I want him!" Her tone took on vigour, vehemence. "He's my husband, isn't he? Want him! He's the only thing on earth I want! Do you hear, Ashes? I don't want the baby! Anyone can have the baby! YOU—YOU can have the baby, Ashes! If you like—" She laughed hysterically and the man fell back to the door, staring at her. She half rose from her bed, her eyes glittering feverishly, as though she would follow him. "Would you like the baby, Ashes?" But he had gone through the door, backwards. She raised her voice. "Yes, I want Bob, Ashes! Keep him for me! You'd better keep him for me, Ashes! Ashes!!!" But he was running back to his bach, as the nurse saw when she followed him to the door. The latter shrugged, muttered: "And Tane Wetane it is, to be sure. Who else?" then she finished preparing the tea and carried some into the bedroom.

"That was a funny way to talk to Mr. Fletcher," she said to her patient. "What did you call him back for?"

"Oh, I just thought he might be able to explain the baby," was the weary answer. "He's very clever, you know."

The nurse grunted out:

"Why can't you be honest about it? You'll cause more trouble, being silly."

Neither man in the bach thought of tea. Bob washed himself in a kerosene tin, keeping an eye

on his friend all the time. It had occurred to him that Fletcher would warn Tane Wetane to leave the place before morning. So when Fletcher did mention that he had some business to attend to over at the depot, actually with that very intention in mind, Salgast said significantly :

" No funny business, Ashes. Where you go, I go—to-night."

He was quiet now, outwardly, but the storm that was raging within him was manifest in a hundred ways. In his trembling hands, which clenched themselves continually and unconsciously ; in his twitching limbs which craved action ; but mostly in that peculiar darkening of the face. The itch to kill sprawled all over him and as night deepened Fletcher was dismayed to see his distress becoming more acute. But he lay down quietly enough at dark time ; there was nothing else to do. He even picked up an old magazine and turned the leaves, seeming to read. Fletcher did the same on his bunk. Neither had undressed. But by and by Bob pitched the book into a corner, swore a fearful oath and sprang onto the floor.

" Ashes ! " he cried, raising his knotted, shaking hands above his head. " Ashes ! Promises are nothing at times like this ! I'm in hell, man ! I'll know the truth ! I must know the truth ! "

He bolted through the door into the dark, just missing Fletcher's grab at him.

The two raced through the darkness, which was

profound, there being no moon. The track to Tane Wetane's hut was well-worn, but still it was rough with the scattery quartz and they held their arms out like wings to steady themselves. They looked unhuman, like two great birds scurrying over the top of the Ridge in the dark, over the top of the mountain which the bluey-black covers of night seemed to join onto the sky. Bob reached the hut first and shot through the open door as though propelled from a catapult.

Tane Wetane was having some supper, some sardines out of a tin. He was seated by his home-made table, a cup of coffee beside him, the tin in one hand and a fork in the other, upon which was skewered a sardine en route to his mouth. He was a personable Maori with all of his share of the naiveté of his race. His jaw dropped low, his fork remained poised, his black eyes popped out in amaze at Salgast's wild intrusion. And when Fletcher rushed in and grappled with Bob on the floor of his hut, Tane Wetane gasped.

"Leave me alone, Ashes!" yelled Bob in the midst of his curses. "I won't kill him! I only want the truth! The truth, Ashes! The truth!" So Fletcher rolled away and got up. So did Bob.

The Maori got up, too, and with the dignity of a well-bred child looked the two over.

"What's the matter, Bob? What's the matter, Fletcher? This is my hut. I don't like fights in my hut."

Bob glared at him, choking with his lack of breath and feeling. Tane frowned and shifted his gaze from him to Fletcher, who said, with the return of a trace of his hesitating manner noticeable in the midst of his agitation :

" It's like this, Tane—. Shut up, Bob !— It's like this. Mrs. Salgast has had a baby and it's a— a Maori baby. See ? " Tane looked puzzled.

" Mrs. Salgast has had a Maori baby ! Well—" Then Tane suddenly grinned. More, he slapped his thigh and laughed outright, doubled up in merriment, indeed. " A Maori baby ! I see ! Haw, haw, haw ! Bob ! " He lifted a hand and pointed a long slim finger at Bob, obviously jeering. " Bob, he doesn't like Maoris. I've heard him say so. And now he's got a Maori baby ! Haw, haw, haw ! "

Fletcher and Salgast had been paralysed with astonishment at this reception but now the husband recovered himself. Mad rage and hatred swept over him ; he emitted a roar, a roar of savage fury and leapt at Wetane, who went down before the impact like a log, striking his head on the table corner as he did so. And Tane's table was pretty rough.

" Bob ! " screamed Fletcher, snatching at the arm Salgast had raised to punch the brown face. " Bob ! He's all in ! He struck his head ! Get up ! "

" Aye ? " Bob staggered back and dropped on Wetane's bunk. " Is he hurt ? " He wiped his

hand across his brow then added: "I hope the bastard's dead."

But Tane was not dead. He soon came to and sat up. Fletcher said:

"Get up, Tane, old man. I'm sorry for this. Bob's a bit mad. He thinks you fathered his wife's child." Tane felt his head and replied:

"Safer here, I think." Then he looked up at Bob and grinned again, weakly. He must have had an acute sense of humour. "Me, aye? No such bloody luck, by golly. You fathered your child yourself. You're Maori too, Bob. Your father was quarter-caste Maori. I know. My mother told me. Everyone knows round the pah. You think you're English, but your people only adopted you—a little baby. Your father, a married man, got a white girl into trouble. You're my cousin, Bob. Your father's my mother's brother. My mother married full blood Maori." A long silence, during which Tane rubbed his head and laughed to himself. "A good one," he muttered. "A good one on Bob."

Fletcher and Salgast were both looking dazed. Then Bob said in a queer small voice:

"I don't believe a word of it. Why didn't he tell us before, Ashes? I don't believe a word of it."

"Tell you before, aye? Why, I went to school with you, Bob. You forgot. I didn't. Remember you said you couldn't tell one Maori from

another ? You don't like the Maoris, Bob. You think you the fine bloody English. New Zealand —they don't mind Maoris."—Wetane waved an arm—. " I come here and one day thought I'd tell you, but I find you don't like Maoris ; I heard you call them bloody niggers, so I shut up. See ? "

Fletcher started to laugh. Bob smiled too, in a sickly feeble way. Then he got up and walked uncertainly out of the hut. Fletcher followed him, still laughing. Bob sat down on a bank outside, thrust his hands into his curly golden mop and asked gingerly :

" Do you think it's true, Ashes ? Can it be true ? "

" Well, you can easily find out. Write to your mother, the mother you know. But it's true, Bob. It's true, all right. My God ! What a relief ! " Fletcher sat down beside his friend who did not notice the extraordinary fervour of his last words. They sat quietly for a time, engrossed in their thoughts, and then Bob turned suddenly and slapped his hand on his friend's knee. He had recovered himself completely ; his voice was jubilant, boisterously jovial.

" Ashes, old man ! It's true ! I know it's true ! I'm damned if I can't feel it in my bones. Remember you told me the strain cropped up ? " But here a dubious note crept into his voice, then anxiety. He jumped up. " But the Missis, Ashes ! My poor old girl ! Think of her position ! What

must she be thinking? Ashes, old man, will she forgive me, do you think?" Fletcher rose briskly.

"Yes, she'll forgive. They always do. But you had better let me go on ahead and tell her. And the nurse. She's had a rough time, Bob. You'll have to make it up to her. Let me prepare her."

"Good old Ashes! Get along, but hurry. I can't get there quick enough."

Fletcher hurried. When he got to the stretch of level ground near the shack he ran. He seemed so buoyant his feet hardly touched the ground.

The nurse was beside the bed washing the baby before putting it in beside the mother for the night.

Mrs. Salgast lay watching it despairingly; tears were smeared all over her face.

Fletcher literally burst in. His usually granite face was aglow; his hair was all rumpled; his coat was ripped in several places, ruined in the fight. He ignored the nurse—or did not see her. He was at the bedside in a stride, almost, leaning down to the face of the mother.

"Annie! Annie! The baby is Bob's after all! Tane Wetane told him that he has Maori blood in his veins. His English parents only adopted him. You're all right, Annie! Bob's the father!" Then his lips closed on the woman's. A long time they kissed, her arms thrown round his neck, then she thrust him back and murmured rapturously:

"Oh, Ashes, I thought it was you."

"OLD SAVAGE"

WATER from the Tasman Sea cuddled itself into a small bay upon the Northern West Coast of the South Island and lapped a pebbly beach reaching almost to the door of a trim wharf guarding the entrance to a railed-in cultivated half-acre.

Within the hut an old man was shakily tasting of the joys of anticipation. He stood before the fire, bent; gnarled hands upon his knees, with skinny neck thrusting out a straggling grey beard and rheumy eyes intent upon a spongy mass of tarry substance resting upon the rough grating.

With creaking joints he reached for an iron bar and thrust it into the mass, and at once clear flames leapt up kindling reciprocal warmth within the heart of the oldster. He dropped the bar and picked up a lump of the shining coal, handling it lovingly, noting its platy structure. True flaming coal it was; best coking coal, and the old man muttered battered endearments to it.

There came to him the sound of galloping hoofs and he hastily dropped the coal and made for the door. A young man flung off his horse with the greeting:

"Well, you old savage! How's things? It's a great evening, eh? what?"

The old man regarded his visitor surlily. The boy's exuberant spirits irritated him, for he was set in his hibernating way ; his self-centred fullness of years resented the aggressive, generous youth of the lad.

"The bay looked that fine to-night I just had to come over and have a yarn," the latter said, gesturing wide. "It's just rotten to be alone on nights like this, you know, Joe," he added, his rough, plain face all softened in sympathy with the divine beauty of sea and sky and wooded hill in the pale flush of the afterglow.

"I don't think so," the old man said shortly. "An' besides, I wasn't feelin' like visitors ternight."

"What's wrong ? Ain't you well ? " The boy was all consideration in a moment.

"Well ? Yes," was the testy answer. "A feller don't have ter be crook ter want ter be by himself."

The boy laughed cheerily. This characteristic of his, of ignoring unpleasantness, also irritated the old man.

"Young fool ! " he mentally apostrophied. "Silly young ass ! "

"Well, if that's how you feel I'll get along. But I'll tell you what, Joe, you're getting a regular old toad through being always by yourself. Better come up to the farm and let me look after you. You could potter about and——"

"No, no! Here I be and here I stay. You let me be."

"All right, old chap. But one of these days you'll come along and doss with Clarence Herbert Hartley, I'll bet." He was off like a shot.

The old man, dilettante miner and prospector until the falling years had brought him the pension, returned to his fire of bitumen. He lumbered heavily into his archaic barrel chair and forced his unpractised imagination into the channels created by his chance discovery of the eight feet seam of coal. After decades of prospecting for the coal which his experience told him was certainly indicated by the rock formation of the country, he had accidentally stumbled on the main seam not more than a mile from his whare and the poor aged body had trembled with excitement ever since.

The mineral rights! Once he had secured them his discovery need remain a secret no longer. And he must secure them himself. He must go away to do it. Couldn't trust anyone to do a ticklish job like that. He knew too much for that. Pity he could not read or write! A vision of young Hartley's decent face raised a doubt of humanity's aggregate untrustworthiness in his mind for a moment, but he shook it off. He must go away himself. Anyhow, it wasn't likely he was going to stay there and die, seeing he would be rich. He would have to get used to—to shiny boots and things.

A flush mounted from his heart to the wrinkles of his brow and he chuckled uncertainly, a bit fearfully. Champagne, eh? Now he wondered what that would taste like. Pity he hadn't found the seam in the good old days when all "the boys" could have sampled his luck.

He drifted away from the present to the joyful past. He remembered the time when old Bert Horn had gone to sleep upon the bench in the township bar and he had cut a cork to fit the sleeper's nose, stuck live matches in it and then, after tenderly attaching it to the great bulbous organ, lit them. Ah! Those were good old days! Pity! Pity! But he would make the best of it.

* * * * * * *

The old man was woefully upset. He had not been away from the bush for twenty years and things were so bewildering in the town at which he had at last arrived by dint of other people's exertions that he could not think. And he was sick at heart with trying to make people understand what he wanted without telling of his discovery. For the poor old mind was sure that if he disclosed his secret to any but the authorities from whom he wanted the mineral rights he would be robbed of his precious seam. Childishly he had worried people and had been at last referred to the police.

The food at his hotel was strange, the table

tools embarrassing and his noisy eating too obviously offended his table companions. He was downright miserable. The pavements hurt his feet and he missed his bowyangs dreadfully. No one spoke a decent word to him and he thought often, if unwillingly, of his young neighbour's: "Come and doss with me, Joe. I'll look after you."

The bay came to him, too, so brightly blue, and he thought that the rata was out now. He never noticed the bay or the rata at home, but certainly whiffs of the luscious cabbage scents assailed his nostrils in this town. He grew immeasurably homesick. His garden must need watering, too.

Somehow the coal seam lost its importance. He wondered now why he had been so happy at finding it. Darn the coal! His hut, his garden and his pipe! He was too old for change, for wealth. But he would have to go through with it since he had started the business. Ah well!

And then young Hartley's words came back to him: "You know, Joe, it's rotten to be alone on nights like this," and the boy's invitation.

* * * * * * *

He trudged the two miles along the shore to Hartley's farm the day after he arrived home. The boy welcomed him with noisy astonishment.

"I got something ter show yer if yer ain't too busy," the old man said casually.

By and by he stood back and watched while Hartley excitedly examined the seam in the small drive he had cut. The boy was unfeignedly glad for the old fellow and enthused over the find like a child.

"Old Son," he said, "I wish you luck. An old savage like you doesn't deserve it but I'm jolly glad just the same."

Walking back he said: "Do you know, Joe, I've decided to sell out. Can't stand the loneliness any longer. It hurts."

"Well, that's a good seam, as yer saw. Best hard coal. Men'll jump ter put money in it. It wouldn't be so sorter lonesome if it was workin'———."

"By Jove, no! I hadn't thought of that," the boy interrupted.

"Only," continued Joe, "I ain't agoin' ter work it."

"What!" Hartley thumped his hand upon the crooked shoulder. "Not work it, man! After prospecting all your life. Rubbish!"

They reached the whare.

"I ain't agoin' ter work it, I tell yer. I'm too old."

He turned unconsciously towards his garden; round about until his glance had compassed all the bay and the boy saw about his aged figure that

which had but lately descended upon him—a softness, a sympathy, a touch of spirituality, as though a sleeping soul were trembling on the verge of awakening. It silenced his monitions.

" Righto, old son," he said softly. " I'm with you, anyway."

" No," said Joe. " I'm old, old, and I want no fal-de-lals. But you're young, lad, you're young, and ——. Ain't yer got a girl ? " he queried, peering out of his rheumy eyes.

The boy blushed. " Yes," he said simply.

They stared at each other in silence. Solemnity fell upon them and then Joe brushed a hand between them as though to whisk away the barrier between youth and age.

" I got something else ter show yer," he said and turned indoors. A large envelope lay upon the table. Joe picked it up and saying : " Here's a weddin' present for yer, we'll say," threw it towards Hartley, then lifted a bucket and hurried outside again.

When he returned the boy was sitting upon the table, very white and queer looking.

" But why, Joe ? " he almost whispered. "Why?"

The old man was flurried. " I'm old," he said testily. " I'm old."

He lumbered into his old barrel chair and Hartley sat opposite him upon a round of log. Silently they sat, absorbed in dreams, until dusk crept down the hills and mantled nature. Who can

say how close they were together? how nearly related the dream thoughts of each? At last Hartley rose.

"Joe," he called softly. "Joe, I'm going."

But the old man did not stir and, leaning closer, the boy saw that he was sleeping, his old briar drooping from the corner of his mouth. Sighing happily, Hartley tiptoed to the door but before closing it behind him he looked back at the dim form beside the dying coal fire.

"Old savage," he murmured. "Old savage. You'll come and doss with me all right, you'll come and doss with——us."

PALS TILL HELL FREEZES

The little group of intellectuals were busily feeding and discussing between whiles the recent surprising marriage of one their number. They often met at table in this manner and indulged in refreshing, quarrelsome arguments and interchange of opinions piquant and original on a variety of subjects; ranging from the latest scientific methods for the propagation or non-propagation of the species, up to the respective merits and demerits of the Dutch School of Art as against the Italian.

A redheaded youth with glasses and freckles seeming to preside at the table's top had just remarked to his neighbour that Ver Meer of Delft was undoubtedly the greatest painter of all time.

"Take his pale blues and lemon colour, now," he added importantly, but was drowned by a shrill sneer from an inquisitive-nosed, aggressive young lady on his right.

"Oh, you!" she jeered. "You and your Van der Meer! You read all that in the library. You learned it off by heart. I know the book. You know as much about painting as I know about babies, and that's nothing at all, thank God!" The general laugh her sally elicited did not, how-

ever, disconcert the youth in any way. He merely peered at her over his glasses and remarked:

"I wish you would learn to dress yourself decently. That yellow thing you've got tagged on to your bones is positively jarring to the æsthetic sense."

"Ver Meer citrine!" she exclaimed triumphantly. She grabbed the hair of the man next to her and laughed gleefully. "It's Ver Meer lemon and he doesn't know!" The youth shrugged.

A man opposite him, a new recruit, asked his neighbour who the two were.

"Oh, they're man and wife," he was told. "They found, through a lucky accident, that they were suited to each other sexually, and tied themselves up to avoid scandal. They visit each other occasionally, merely on sexual grounds. Otherwise, they detest each other, and she, being a clever little devil, takes a rise out of him every time."

Here the conversation became disorderly. The mention of babies had again brought up the subject of the marriage of their comrade, and now each one seemed determined to make everybody else listen to his or her opinion on the matter. Only one of them was silent; the new recruit.

This man had but lately landed from Sydney. There was nothing especially striking about his appearance except his eyes, which were literally over-burdened with his ego. Sunken, almost ferociously avid for interest, they darted here, there

and everywhere ; licking up, calculating, judging and pigeonholing every gesture and word of his associates. His brow was broad and white, the rest of his face merely nondescript and Scotch. He was small enough to be insignificant among men, and curved at the shoulders. Yet one knew him at once for a leader, for a warrior, by reason of the extraordinary virility which broke through every nuance. All of this group were interesting, at least ; some of them arrestingly so; but for the dominant note, though he uttered no word, one would have unhesitatingly picked on him.

The woman beside him was a glorious creature, duskily brilliant. Her fiery spirit glowed through her skin with a fitful ebb and flow, like inward flames now leaping, now dying. There was a passionate pout to her lips, stained red ; a natural rich ruby in her cheeks. Her eyes were pools stolen from tropical night. Her gown, as much of it as could be seen above the table, which was not much, was of fire, out of which her modelled shoulders rose superbly. Now and then she would shoot her quota of rapid-fire talk into the general hubbub, and the new recruit noticed that none of them could compete with her in wit, nor rival her knowledge of those subjects she chose to discourse on. She voiced her views of the marriage under discussion passionately.

" Just imagine Anna, our wonderful Anna, with her knowledge, her analytical brain, her love of

quick and subtle repartee, being doomed to live with that stodgy creature! He's never read a book! I shook her when she told me, and I absolutely refused to be present at the ceremony. Do you know, he actually wanted her to be married by a parson, but I'm glad to say that she drew the line at that. Though I believe—if he had insisted—— Oh, I've no time for these fool women, anyhow. I can imagine myself falling in love with a brainy Selenite rather than with a stupid Apollo like Dick Rassen."

A happy-looking little man seated on the other side of the table shot warm glances of love and admiration at her and she responded to him vividly. She laughed at him, flashing her white teeth, then held out her hand and he kissed it.

"Showy," the new recruit labelled her. "With a trace of foreign blood."

"Here, you two. Cut that out!" and similar good-natured remonstrances came from all sides. It was easy to see that these two were favourites. The new recruit watched the woman while he continually drank cheap beer. She turned to him later.

"Here, how much more of that filthy stuff are you going to drink? Tell me! What do you think of this marriage, anyhow?" He filled his glass again and critically scanned her over its rim.

"Do you know, I want to get drunk to-night," he said. She considered him, gauging his seriousness, then said gently :

" Surely not, surely not. I detest drunk men."

" Surely yes," he answered, and leant towards her. " Say, if I don't get drunk, will you come for a walk with me ? I'll tell you a tale ; what I think of this marriage you are all so excited about." She toyed with a fork and silently considered his request. By and by :

" Why, yes, I'll come," she said eagerly. " Wait a moment." She went round to the happy-looking little man and whispered to him. He glanced reflectively at the stranger, hesitated, then nodded with an : " All right."

So the woman and the new recruit put on their coats and left the noisy crew still buzzing.

They walked along Manners Street, then down Wilis Street to the Quay without speaking. There the woman stopped.

" Where shall we go ? You don't want to talk in the street, I suppose ? "

" You know this place better than I do. You suggest a place," he answered.

" There is an old God's Acre not far from here, where we could sit in view of the Bay. Of course there's spooks——"

" Let's go ! " he interrupted. " I love them."

Climbing up Woodward Street they soon reached the little wooden gate at the west side of Bolton St. cemetery and entered. Leaving the path winding among the tombs the woman guided him up the daisy-starred, grassy hillock to their left.

Beside a plot almost hidden by spreading tangle of cherry-ripe, fuchsia and climbing roses, she stopped.

"Here. This is a favourite spot of mine. Let us make ourselves cosy and have a talk. At least you shall talk and I shall listen." They sat down.

The man threw off his hat, lit a cigarette, lay against the bank and smoked it through before he said a word. Then he began:

"This marriage—the marriage of the woman Anna—you people cannot understand why a woman gifted with an intellectuality away beyond the average could love and mate with a brainless noodle like Rassen. Well, I can't understand it either. It's one of the things we can only marvel at and discuss, not explain. I'll tell you a personal yarn. I'll tell you of an—an experience I had when in Melbourne. In fact, I'm still going through it.

"You know, I suppose, that before commencing my recent research work in Sydney, I spent some years in Melbourne lecturing and teaching? Yes. Well, it was during that time. I had a mate, then, a friend. Rather a funny sort of friend for me to have, you might think. Ben was about as nearly my opposite as a man could be. He was big, good to look at, generous to give himself in every way. Quick, also, to reflect the warmth of appreciation in a woman's eye. A strange man in lots of ways and voluble to a fault; but he left me alone and we were pretty pally, though without any frills, of course."

He lit another cigarette and the woman's eyes dwelt on the face lit up by the tiny match flame. He caught the look and smiled, then drew her coat up around her throat and settled himself close to her.

"You have loved women?" she asked.

"Oh, yes. Lots of times, from a distance. You know.—" Here he stammered slightly, boyishly—"You know, I am hardly what you would call a ladies' man, though I am always with women. I can never screw up my courage far enough to risk a rebuff. A man has to be pretty careful, you know, when he intends never to marry." There was a silence, then:

"And so you let them all pass by?"

"All but one," he answered. "All but one, and she—. That is the perplexing thing I want to tell you about. My other loves were of my class, intellectuals, fit to mate with a man of my capacities." Here he flung up a deprecatory glance and scratched his head. "I say, that sounded pretty rotten, didn't it?" She ruffled his sleek head.

"Yes, it did. But it doesn't matter. I forgive you." She laughed tolerantly. "You economists are always frightfully conceited, aren't you? But never mind. You've reason to be. Get along."

"You are sure you have any amount of time? I don't want to cause any unpleasantness in your home."

"There is no question of that," she answered

impatiently. "That's my business, anyhow. I am pretty touchy about things of that kind, my dear. I hate to be considered at anybody else's beck and call." Then she laughed softly and added: "Besides, that little woman in the Ver lemon is desperately in love with my husband just now. She is sure to insist on him taking her home and just as surely she will not let him go before twelve. She is a dear little kid, all the same I'm very fond of her. You need not worry about me."

"Well, I am a constant lover, Rosa. I think I can truly say that all of my loves are still with me; and as for the one I am going to tell you of—I believe that memories of her will penetrate and disturb the peace of my grave."

"Good Gracious! As bad as all that?" She spoke lightly, with the faintest hint of sarcasm. He sat bolt upright, threw his cigarette away and muttered sulkily:

"Oh, all right. If you're going to take it like that——"

"I'm sorry, Jack," she said quickly. "I didn't mean to be unkind. I half thought you were joking. That little outburst was not like you at all, you must admit. It is not like you to be sentimental. I'm sorry." He eased his body against the bank again, grudgingly.

"I am showing you a side of me that very few know exists. I don't parade my private affairs before the public eye. There are not many people

would get my confidence." He thrust an arm beneath his head and looked away from her out over the harbour. He was a " big " man in the world of political economy, the biggest in Australasia, indeed, yet he lay there like a sulky child denied its lollipop. She had failed of the deference he considered his meed.

She understood. She knew the colossal vanity of his type and did not resent it. She was a " big " woman herself. So she reached out a hand and pressed his arm, repeating :

" I'm sorry, Jack." Inwardly she added : " You spoilt baby ; you ought to be spanked." So he continued :

" Well, I'll have to tell you of my mate first, for it was he who brought her into my life. It is usually the mate's wife or the wife's friend, isn't it ?

" Ben had a craze for books. He would bring home fresh books from the lecture hall every week and I don't think he ever read one of them right through. No application. You know the type. But tremendously vital and energetic. He would have been a big force in the movement if he could have applied himself to serious study. As it was he was mostly a nuisance.

" The half of an idea was the most he ever seemed able to grasp and he would remorselessly inflict that half idea on one and all in the most trying and absurd manner. But he and I—. Well we were pals. I was pretty busy. I was conducting a

class of a hundred odd on the Materialist Conception of History, and at the same time preparing a series of lectures I had been asked to deliver on Evolution. During the day I drove a bakers' cart for a living wage, so you can imagine I had not much time for keeping tag on Ben's vagaries of conduct.

"One evening he told me in an apologetic, half-ashamed manner that he was getting married next day. I was rather astonished that a girl would risk the matrimonial venture with him; otherwise the thing was quite natural, of course, so I did not say much beyond a few remarks of regret at losing my pal.

"'Get that fool idea out of your head,' he exclaimed. 'We're pals till hell freezes, old son, and don't you forget it. The woman never lived that could get my goat to that extent.' He pushed away my attempt to point out that marriage involved certain unavoidable obligations for the contracting parties.

"'Rot!' he jerked out. 'I guess I'm as well able to manœuvre my life married as single. I've made that stipulation anyhow. Our friendship is going to remain just where it is.' He told me that the girl, Jessie, was a new arrival from home. He had taken the room next to ours for them, and I was to have my meals with them. I remonstrated, but he insisted in his dictatorial way that my work for the movement was of more consequence than

any other consideration whatever, and he was not going to have my habits interfered with while I was so busy.

" He had been in the habit of cooking my meals himself. Anyhow, he said that if I didn't agree the marriage was off, so that settled it.

" Next day they were married at eleven in the morning. I couldn't get the day off so jumped from my cart at the office door and acted best man in my working togs.

" She was a nice little girl, a factory hand. A sensible body, but when you said that you were through. I don't believe she had ever opened a book in her life, and when Ben talked about the movement (he seldom talked of anything else) she looked at him in a nonplussed, inarticulate way that even then roused in him a scarcely repressed impatience.

" And I tell you that for the next few weeks that little girl would have been puzzled to say whether she padded earth the right end up or walked inverted. It was cruel. He hammered his half-ideas into her poor little understanding indefatigably. I could hear him at all hours of the night and soon got fairly exasperated myself, for she began to look most wretched. The only peace she had was when his love (for he was really in love) triumphed over his crazy enthusiasms and inspired him to sit for an hour at a time with her in his arms, fondling and caressing her.

"I loved him at those times. Though even then he displayed no sort of consideration for her. Singularly free from self-consciousness himself, he simply could not understand her reluctance to have their conjugal felicity given expression to before me. At times he astonished and embarrassed me. For instance, at the table, or any time, in the midst of his voluble disquisitions he would suddenly conceive a violent desire for his little lady and he would reach out his great hands and take her up.

"'Get out, Jack,' he would say. 'Get out, there's a good fellow.' Some boy, Ben, upon my word! But as the habit of marriage grew upon him his love periods became less frequent and his irritation at her incogitancy more querulously pronounced. Why on earth he couldn't be satisfied with my confabulation and leave the little woman alone I could not understand. And then one night things reached a crisis.

"He had met a friend on the way home from work, had had a drink or two and a yarn and was consequently late for dinner. At that time the rows among the various comrades were rather more envenomed than usual and Ben's friend had given him an account of certain little moves on the part of his antagonists which he reckoned were designed specially to reflect discredit on him and his proponents.

"And for two solid hours after his arrival home

he talked. Before his marriage he would have taken himself off to the lecture hall and delivered himself of this diatribe so as not to interfere with my work. But now, of course, there was the fact that I could have left them to it and retired to my own room. But somehow I could not leave her alone. While I was there he was compelled to address himself to me part of the time, and even though I knew it was none of my business, I—well, anyhow, I stayed.

" And the little woman, all worn out as she was by the past months of strain and striving for understanding of an ideology which was in any case not understandable because of its incoherency, its wrongly-applied, half-assimilated scientific principles, broke up completely.

" She was sitting in an arm-chair by the fire, her arms thrown up above her head. Now and again her brown eyes would rest on Ben for an instant and then skim across the room to me. He was still seated at the dinner-table.

" And he talked. I understood then why the comrades used to wonder how I managed to room with him. And without any warning, Jessie began to sob. She laid her head upon her knees and sobbed bitterly. I had never before seen a woman cry. My heart contracted. Ben stopped short.

" ' Why ? What the hell——' He half rose, staring. Then his manhood sent him to his knees at her side and his arms went round her.

"'Jessie, darling, what is it, Love? What is the matter, Sweetheart?' He attempted to lift her up, but to his surprise, and equally to mine, she dragged herself away from him, stood wringing her hands for an instant, then rushed across the room and threw her arms around my neck."

"Oh, the poor little girl! What shame! The brute! I hope you did not fail her, Jack. You played up?" The woman in the starlit garden turned to the man, clutched at him and leant close. She hovered above him like a nebulous passion-flower, and he forgot his tale for an instant to think that this woman was not beautiful so much as she was picturesque.

"I guess I did. I live that scene over again very often. It marked the beginning of the sweetest, in fact, the only real sex experience I have known. It was cruel, too, specially to the girl. Things are always cruel to the girl, aren't they? But I'll get on.

"Being unprepared for such a development, and not being experienced in men's ways with women, I simply stood like a gawk. As for Ben—his face was a study. I recovered sufficiently to fold the girl in my arms, but even in my first bewilderment I caught the instant's flare of jealousy which leapt tigerishly into his eyes. But it was gone like a flash and he stood there flustered, pushing with spread fingers his long heavy hair from off his brow. Then I said:

"'You go for a walk, Ben, for half an hour.'

"'Oh, all right, Jack, if you think so.' He snatched up his cap and fumbled with it as he reached the door. "You are sure you—you are sure—or, damn it, Jack, d'ye think I'd better?' He stood with the door half open and I smiled and nodded. He looked beseechingly at Jessie and then dived out.

"I won't repeat what I said to her nor much of what she said to me. It's beside the point and anyhow we said very little. I gathered that she wanted a child and that he would not agree. I did not care to discuss this matter with her, though, but said I would try to relieve her in other ways. I sent her off to bed and when Ben returned, which he did long before the half-hour was up, I took him off and talked to him unsparingly.

"He took it better than I expected and for a week or two afterwards Jessie was happy enough. But from then onwards, to make a long story short, he drifted away from her. His natural loquacity clamoured for vent, I suppose, so that, denied expression in his home, he was compelled to return to old companions.

"Say, are you warm? You haven't got much on and the night air is not very warm at any time of the year in this confounded country. Now in Australia——"

"Yes, I'm warm. And never mind the country. It's good enough for me and I hate your old Aus-

tralia. Go on with your story. It is awfully interesting. What happened next ? "

" I filled the breach created by Ben's desertion. She was alone in a strange land—no friends. The women of Ben's circle and of mine, too, of course, were of the movement. She could not understand them, felt lost among their 'ology talk ; and she could see that they laughed at Ben's pretentious verbosity and hated them for it like the loyal little soul she really was.

" So now that my lectures were things of the past and I was not so very busy, I gradually dropped into the habit of taking her about. Truly I did not dream of possible eventualities. She was so very average, but sweet, you know ; dear and sweet—and—and Oh, Lord ! " With a swift movement he flung around and buried his face against the woman, who impulsively pressed her hands upon his head.

She looked out over the Bay. It was so beautiful, that Bay. A great dark pool in a colossal amphitheatre with gem-studded walls ; sapphire, emerald and ruby lights in a magnificent setting of gold. Automobiles flashed suddenly around bare corners of the hills, their immense goggle eyes lashing the pool of the harbour with their glare, or striking up into the sky for an instant only. At the King's wharf, just arrived that day on her maiden trip from home, the *Aorangi* rested, her decks alive with visitors, the wharf packed with crowds of the curious and interested.

The woman looked down at the city. Wellington was bathed in light. The clamour of its streets roared up to her. Away to the right Fuller's vaudeville snakily traced its advertisement on the night, and Ford's huge building overtopped the town like a grim sentinel of might.

Many cities of big countries lay enshrined within the memory of this woman, this woman fancy-fond; but this little city below her, she thought, seemed to harbour a spirit of restlessness all its own. To call—to call—and return.

The man stirred again.

"You have been in love?" he asked. "You know the hurt of it and the joys and the drunkenness?"

"Yes, I know it. I've known it for twelve years, my friend. With one man; and no other woman for him. Peculiar, isn't it?"

"Well, I don't know. I know several couples. It's the combination of sex and intellect. But you are suited to each other. With me—there was Ben also, my friend, and the movement, to think of."

"No, not the movement!" She spoke impatiently. "That silly idea makes me tired! The movement! As though your private affairs had anything to do with it! Why, there never was a man or woman yet of any real value in public life whose morals were conventional. Conventions are only for the common people—for what I call the cow-people, Jack. You and your kind blaze new

trails. How absurd, to expect you to regulate your private actions according to the notions of the mob. A cause that demands sacrifice of personality is not worth a curse. But our movement does not demand it. Our movement is not one of persons but of principles. And as for your friend —this Ben of yours—seems to me that what he needed most was to be hurt, hurt badly. Didn't he object to your companionship with his wife ? "

" No, not at all and that's mostly why——. He was fine in some ways. Everybody is, for that matter. He trusted us both absolutely. And because of that we fought—. At least, I fought. Jessie didn't.

" Now, how do you account for that ? There was I, understanding perfectly the social evolution of marriage, realizing that I had as much right to the woman as Ben had, yet sacrificing my rights, my happiness—hers too—for Ben's sake. And there was she, an ordinary, conventional little soul, perfectly willing to conduct a liaison with me ; not even questioning the morality of it. How do you account for it ? You ought to understand it. It seemed natural for her, a clean-minded woman, to accept any man her desire selected, yet I couldn't betray my friend by seducing his wife."

Comrade Rosa pulled at the grass. There was a smile almost of contempt around her red lips.

" Yes, I understand it and so should you." She broke off a long stalk and turned to him deliber-

ately, wagging the stalk at him. "But I can explain best by telling you something I don't understand. That is, that the men I know who are most conventional in their sex relations, most narrow-minded and hard in their judgments on the—let us say, on the idiosyncracies of others, are those men who profess to understand the reason for everything; those men who profess, and who do understand, the historic significance of our sex habits and relations. Those men—those men, Jack—" she leaned towards him with the contempt fully manifest now—"who understand but are too damned cowardly to be logical and consistent and can't forgive others who are brave enough to defy customs they don't understand and which they believe to be right. You like to think you were considering your friend. You were too cowardly to put your theories into practice, that's all. The girl knew nothing. Her action was biological; your action in refusing her was the deliberate disregard of reason and right for convention——" He snatched at her hand with a grip surprisingly strong.

"Oh ho! My dear Rosa! Just a minute, please. Go steady, now. Of course we understand these things. Of course I know I had a right to Jessie. I admitted that. But you should understand that reason and knowledge are one thing, inherited instinct another. I admit I caved in to convention, but I don't admit the cowardice."

"No, you wouldn't."

"It's not a question of cowardice at all. It will take generations, perhaps centuries, to weed out of man his inherited property instinct in woman. And you have never heard me criticize others either."

"No, I haven't known you long. But I heard Jimmy Lye, who, until your advent, was easily the first man in New Zealand in our world, criticize a film star because she was accused of collusion with her husband in divorce proceedings. I had remarked that this star was a charming little lady and he grunted out:

"'Haw! Dirty trollop! What about her divorce?' And you will find the same thing right throughout the labour world, Jack. A woman daren't be decently mannered in the working-class movement of New Zealand. If she shows the least evidence of refinement or decent breeding to a man, he thinks she is putting the 'hard word' on him. I've had to get very nasty on several occasions with different men who evidently thought my ordinary manner a little too ornamental for common use."

"So it is, Rosa, so it is. You are beautiful. You are well-bred and charming. And these people can't understand you. What chance have they had to root their way out of the pigsties they were brought up in? Most of them came out of the slums of Glasgow and London. They're awful, but it's inevitable. In the older countries

we have none of that sort of thing because the labour crowd is recruited from all classes. In New Zealand we have only workers in the active movement. Any man would fall for you, anyhow." He crushed her hand to his lips, plainly indicating his own vulnerability. She smacked him softly on the face and laughed.

"Goose! We'll be here all night at this rate."

"I don't mind, but——

"I hardly know how to tell you the rest. It is not clear to me altogether. I was bewildered, when first I knew, and dismayed. I kept away—for two days. She came into my room after me. I am a bad dissimulator. She knew at once. She did not think me serious when I proposed separation, when I suggested that I go away.

"'But why?' she asked. 'You love me, I love you. Why go away?' I spoke of Ben.

"'Oh, yes, that is a shame,' she said, a little downcast. But she soon brightened again. 'He will never know, Jack. And it isn't as though we were going to do anything really wrong. Just going about together won't hurt Ben.' I could hardly believe her serious. I considered her. I found it hard to keep my hands off her. But she meant it right enough.

"'But Jessie,' I said. 'I'm a red-blooded man, girl, and I love you. Do you think we could go on as we have been doing with this knowledge of our love between us?'

"'Well, I don't see why not,' she said. Then her eyes met mine fully and she coloured and her head drooped.

"'Yes, you do see why not, little woman,' I answered. She rose and came swiftly to me with her hands clasped.

"'Try, Jack,' she urged. 'Try. I shall not pester you. Not if I can help it, anyhow.' As she added the last words her eyes filled and she smiled at me through tears. It was too much for me. I had to embrace her. And that was the end of that argument. I couldn't leave her.

"During the next six months I learned many things. I had read, of course, a lot about sex, and now I was surprised to find how right men writers on woman subjects could be. Caresses, mere proximity, seemed all-satisfying to Jessie; whereas with me—well, I needn't expatiate on how it was with me. But I managed to keep within the bounds of her desires. To tell the truth, Rosa, I was frightened to yield to my love, frightened of results. I had to admit that she had me enslaved. Stupid as she was—(yes, it's true she was stupid and the truth is never out of place. Love does not really blind the lover, you know. With me, I believe I became more critical. One forgives and excuses when one loves, that is all)—Stupid as she was, I say, she had me properly in leash. And how frank women are! Or perhaps she was an exception——"

"Oh, she wouldn't be an exception," the woman interrupted. "I have heard women talk openly—and decently, mind you—among themselves, of things that their husbands would blush to mention. Personally, I don't deplore the trait. The reason for it is that such things are to woman mostly painful, practical physical ordeals. While with the man, whose actual participation in the life-giving process ceases with the delights of love-union, there remains a suggestion of mystery, of sacrament even. So she was frank. Yes?"

"Amazingly so, to me. She would tell me quite naturally even details of her experiences with Ben until I would writhe with jealousy and could scarcely forbear attacking her."

"She did not deny herself to the other, then, while loving you?"

"Oh, no! Oh, no! There was nothing strong or what you would call high-principled about her at all. Just an ordinary little woman thoroughly imbued with the inherited chattel instinct.

"But she would tell me how she hated it and just because of my position I could not explain to her her right to withhold herself, her right to absolute control over her own body." A little sarcastic: "Oh, no," popped in here.—

"After six months of loving companionship, anyhow, Ben knew. No, this was not any 'mutual friend' enlightenment, but just a case of sensing it. He sensed it. I saw him sense it. It was a

wonder he had not seen it in Jessie long before, anyhow. She was as guileless as a child. I knew that the comrades had been 'wise' to things long before.

"We were sitting at dinner one evening in early spring. Jessie and I sat opposite each other. Ben at the end of the little table. We were all three chatting pleasantly, for a wonder. Usually Jessie sat silent while Ben and I pursued the line of heated discussion. But for once the conversation was on a par with her limited intelligence and she waxed quite enthusiastic over little topics of her own selection. She looked very attractive, I remember, with her flushed cheeks and bright eyes. Ben and I both warmed to her and even though I seemed to myself to be rigidly repressing all signs of undue interest, there must have been some current of a—of a—well, I'll say of a psychic nature, for want of a better word—flowing from me and impregnating the room, for of a sudden I noticed that the anticipatory, pouncing husband's regard which Ben's eyes had been levelling at Jessie had vanished. He was eating rapidly and unheedingly, and all around him there seemed to be settling a frightened, troubled aura of doubt.

"Jessie prattled happily on, too obtuse to notice anything but the perfectly obvious, paying no special attention to either of us. I leapt to the truth on the instant, however, and all my faculties were alert to meet the situation. If Ben had not

been my mate I believe I would have let the movement go hang and have simply walked away with Jessie. By God, but I wanted to! I couldn't tell you, Rosa, how dear to me she was at that moment. But I thought rapidly and suffered some too, while all the time I could see that Ben was fighting to purge himself of the ugly suspicion that in some incomprehensible way had descended upon him. I could almost follow his every thought. He was transparent as glass. And his loyalty to me got my goat completely; for he really did thrust the disturbance from him. I saw his hands tremble. I saw his lowered face go grey and only the fact that Jessie and I had never consummated our love prevented me from feeling a miserable worm.

"It is all very well for you to sneer, Rosa, but at times like that, when one's dearest associations are threatened with annihilation, one can't reason scientifically on rights. One can only see how damnable it is to be compelled either to relinquish one's greatest desire or to gain it at the expense of another's broken life. And this man was my friend.

"Rosa, woman! After a few minutes he lifted his face to meet my eyes, and in his there was a—a love—and trust—an almost holy sort of trust. It brought into my mind—I almost said into my soul—a prayer, a prayer addressed to my manhood for strength to justify his loyalty. And when his eyes met mine, he saw in them that I knew of his suspicion, of his fight, and such was his fineness

he flushed all over for shame that he should even suspect me.

"In that moment we both forgot the woman, who I knew in a dim way had at last become aware of something untoward, for she was staring, rather white.

"Then Ben stood up quickly.

"'Jack,' he said: just 'Jack!' And I rose too. 'We're pals till hell freezes, old son! We're pals!' And I said—it was a funny thing to say, Rosa—I said:

"'So help me, God!' Our hands shot out and gripped and I really thought in that instant that no woman's love was worth the sacrifice of a mate. Standing there, our hands gripped, with the woman sitting still as stone between us, I told him.

"We talked about it until the early hours of the morning. We two, mostly, for Jessie hardly said a word. She was sulky and angry—" (the woman in the garden laughed nastily)—"cried now and again, and was puzzled as to how it had come about. She was disappointed in me, too, I could see. She showed clearly enough that she thought I should have denied it, bluffed it out. I wanted to go away. I insisted, but Ben said:

"'No! Stay here and fight it out. You're not children. You'll get over it, Jack, and I'll devote myself to Jessie.'" The woman in the garden audibly ground her teeth.

"But at last I made him see that I must go, for a time, at least.

"'For six months, then,' he said. 'I'll come after you after six months.' Jessie cried bitterly at this. Ben was very patient and loving with her. In just the right way, too. I had not dreamed of such gentleness within him. He did not touch her.

"'I'll come and sleep in your room again for a while, Jack,' he said. 'If I had only dreamed of such a thing! I can hardly forgive you, old chap. Why in hell did you let me—let me live with a girl when she was in love with another man? A fellow feels such a skunk.'

"I can see him now. One shoulder against the mantel-shelf and his hand gripping it, while the other continually thrust spread-fingers through his hair.

"So I went away for six months. He even left Jessie and me alone to say good-bye. Not that it mattered. She wouldn't speak to me, nor shake hands. Her face was set and white. Then Ben came to the station with me. As the train moved out he put his arm through the window around my shoulders and said:

"'Women are the devil, Jack, the very devil! But they can't part pals like us. Six months! six months!'

"He wrote to me continually. For the first few months he told me that Jessie was fretting and moping, but gradually his news became more cheerful, and after about five months he wrote that they were living together again and it was time I was coming home.

" As for me.—I had gone out into the open spaces of the back country. I had a bit of money, so—. Say, have you ever been out-back in Australia ? No ? Well, it's great ! A man grows earthwards. Long, rolling desert lands—a brooding quiet that rests a man wonderfully for a month or two and then sends him mad. Forest lands—golden wattle and blue gums with their resinous scents and dropping tasselled caps. The smells of the earth and all growing things. The crackle of dry bark beneath one's feet. The snap of the burning twigs ; the leap of the bright clear flame towards the hanging billy ; or the glow of wood coals as deepening night wraps one round with fold upon fold of sable.

" I grew strong in those places, Rosa. They put new life into me. A different, wonderful sort of life and strength, that of the out-back, where nature's vastness and calm dwarfs our puny affairs to a proper proportion. In a few months I learned to think quite impersonally of Jessie. In fact, towards the last, and the last came with the end of my money, I seldom gave her a thought. When the train steamed back towards Melbourne with me aboard, it was the thought of Ben's handclasp, of his exuberant welcome, which stirred in me a pleasurable excitement. I heard his roar as I stepped out on the platform.

" ' Jack, old son ! Back just in time to hold the old party together ! Everything gone to hell since

you left!' He talked and talked, the same old Ben. But gee! How good it was to hear him. 'Your old room is ready for you,' he said. 'The occupants left it a while back so I kept it for you.'

"'Now look here, Ben,' I said. 'Don't be a fool! I am sure of myself now, and so, I suppose, is Jessie; but it's a fool's game to look for trouble a second time. I'm not going back to your house. We'll look for a room around somewhere after dinner.' He did not like it at all, but I intended running things my own way this time so he had to lump it.

"'Here he is, Jess!' he yelled as he opened the door. 'Here's the old son-of-a-gun!' She was setting the table, just the same little woman with the same old table and the same old ware. I had been a tiny bit dubious about seeing her again, but it was all right. I was glad to see her and that was all. She was all right, too. She tumbled down an armful of plates and reached both hands across the table to me.

"It was a relief to feel secure, you can bet, Rosa. And how Ben laughed! Boisterously, crazily. He eagerly poured out the tale of what had happened in my absence and then I talked about my travels. I've quite a gift for yarning on occasion, you know, and now, being a little excited, I excelled myself. Ben rested his hands on the table and glued his eyes on my face. His own fairly shone with satisfaction and delight.

"In such a mood he was easily the most attractive personality I have met. He seemed literally to vibrate with vitality and sex appeal. How a woman of Jessie's type could waste a thought or a look on me when Ben was around puzzles me. And added to his old personal magnetism there was now a sort—a sort of gracious forbearance, if you can get me ; a new, almost timid quality which sat strangely on him. He was not nearly so ardently impatient. Others spoke to me of the change in him afterwards. A change which was welcomed by everybody but which I only could understand.

"I knew it was the glimpse he had visioned of the uncertainty of life ; the glimpse he had caught of the fluidic nature of life-forces which he had hitherto unconsciously regarded as solid.

"I think he must have been too strong and forceful for Jessie. She was swamped in his tropic exuberance. Just a gentle little English meadow-flower, she drooped and wilted beneath his tempestuous passions.

"You were the woman for Ben, Rosa. You'd have made a great pair. You would have developed him mentally, too.

"Anyhow, that first night of my return I scarcely saw Jessie after our greeting and for that reason received no further impressions as to her attitude towards me. But on the following night—the damned thing came creeping back with all its cruel fascination.

"There she sat, opposite me again, with the husband and friend between and treacherously, insidiously, the old love came creeping back. I got so I couldn't take my eyes off her. My ears strained at the tiniest rustle of her dress. My fingers itched to bury themselves in the shining masses of her hair. I grew dumb with love for her. By God, it was awful! I felt myself to be a huge receptacle of love and desire. I was bewitched. There she sat, inclining towards me, and from the first quiver of it within myself again I knew that she was still mine.

"It was the most extraordinary thing! I grew dumb, I say. I forgot Ben and must have sat staring at her. I couldn't control myself at all. I could not attempt to control myself. It was impossible. I must have sat staring, for her eyes met mine and when I came to myself our hands were clasped across the table and Ben, white to the lips, was staring horribly, with the spread-fingers of both hands thrust into his hair." The man flung forward, clutching at the grass on either side of him. He half whispered:

"By God! That was hell, if you like, Rosa. Fair hell for both of us."

"Yes, but it was a simple situation. Horrible, but simple." He did not seem to hear her. His head was drooped on his breast and he soon resumed:

"And she was a weak little soul; quite average.

As incapable of rising to heights as of falling to depths.

"We both knew, Ben and I, that the issue lay strictly between us two. She could not combat our will. Then again he rose up and stood looking down on me. It seemed a year before he spoke this time, and—D'ye know what he said, Rosa? That good old Ben! He stood there with the shock full upon him and said:

"'I see! I see! I should have seen before. You can't get away from love, Jack. You can't lose love by running away. I am the odd man out, old chap, so I'll get out and you can take my place. And we'll still be pals, Jack. We'll still be pals! Pals till hell freezes, that's what I said. Pals till hell freezes.'

"And for a moment—for a moment I acquiesced. But the moment passed, and I said:

"'We'll go out into the air and talk it over, Ben. We'll make an end of it this time."—The woman beside him stifled an exclamation of disgust.—"As we passed out I looked back at Jessie. She was half risen, piteous and futile-looking and I felt ashamed."—An angry murmur reached him:

"Oh, did you? That's funny. That's humorous. You felt ashamed."

"Oh, I know it must sound pretty rotten to you, Rosa. But the thing was that I loved Ben the most."

"Oh, that stuff! Aren't you a man? Haven't

you a spark of chivalry or decency in you at all? Ben and you! A bright couple! Two socialists! By God! D'ye know what I would do if you tried that game on with me? I'd put a bullet through you."

"I believe you would, too. But nevertheless, my dear Rosa, if you came up against my situation I believe you would do exactly as I did. I felt absolutely ashamed but I did the only thing possible at the time. I didn't struggle to do it; nor reason, nor anything. It was the natural action of my particular make-up. I wanted her but I couldn't take her from Ben right there in front of his misery. I would sooner have drowned myself.

"We went out into the streets and I told Ben that I would not visit them again nor speak to Jessie if I met her out. She would get over it again and so would I and everything would be just the same in no time. He was crushed. Simply listened and said nothing. He stayed with me all night——"

"And I suppose neither of you gave a thought to the little girl left alone?"

"What could I do? I couldn't send him back to her then. She was better alone."

"Suits you to think so. Go on."

"He went to work from my room the next morning and that night I found him drunk as a lord in my street with the soilure of his work still upon him. So I again kept him with me, after ringing up Jessie to tell her. She tried to appeal to me over the

phone but I just couldn't stand it and hung up the receiver. Ben sobered up clear-minded enough and went back home next day. I lined up for sale before the foreman's stool on the water-front.

"I saw Ben every night but neither of us ever mentioned the woman.

"Then, a few weeks afterwards, when my blood was still hot with the want of her, she saw me in the street and followed me home. I returned from the bathroom to find her seated on my bed.

"We stared. I had a queer feeling, as though she had tracked me down. I tried to be matter-of-fact about it.

"'Why, Jess! It's good of you to look me up. How's things?' But I did not move towards her. Her face grew obstinate, childishly so.

"'You can cut that out, Jack,' she said. 'I've had enough of being played with by you and Ben. If you won't love me I'm going to leave Ben and go to work.' She stood up and faced me resolutely. I went hot and cold all over. She was in my room, inviting me. I trembled. My love leapt into my face, I knew. She saw it, and broke up. Her face quivered and her little capable hands, which I had hitherto seen so firm, wavered uncertainly towards me. They drew me forward irresistibly. And as I moved she sank down upon my bed and quavered out:

"'You're killing me, Jack! You and Ben. You're killing me!'

"And I—I—Oh, Rosa, my dear, that did for me. I—I almost ate her up."

Encompassed by the pansy-purple velvet of the starshine the man and woman in God's Acre sat in palpitating silence. Then she said softly:

"I'm glad; so glad. If you hadn't, Jack, I would never have spoken to you again. I couldn't. You'd be to me as though you had blood on your hands. I'm not very particular in my choice of associates, but I draw the line at a man who deliberately destroys a woman's loveliness. But I suppose you are going to say that you suffered torments of conscience?"

"Oh, no. As a matter-of-fact, once committed, I had no qualms about Ben at all. Jessie and I were wonderfully happy after that. My work on the water-front being intermittent we were able to meet often during the day. She wouldn't consider leaving Ben. That's funny, too, I think. Women are certainly the devil. She preferred to remain in her groove; which suited me on account of Ben and the movement.

"We were very happy for quite a time. About nine months, I think. Ben was happy, too. He would tell me now how finely he and Jess were getting along.

"And then he found out again; this time through the 'mutual friend.' He badly mauled the brute that told him; smashed his face for him, then burst in on Jessie like a madman. She and I had

spent several hours together that day; our last hours together, had we but known it. She wrote me everything afterwards.

"It was frightful for her. She couldn't deny his accusation. She crouched on the sofa and he stood above her and asked was it true we had been meeting? He clutched at his head with his hands and stood looking down on her with awful eyes. And when he found it true he still stood there, swaying as though he were giddy; and there came upon him something dreadful; something which sent Jessie to her knees on the floor clutching at him in terror.

"He hauled her up to him and shook her like a rat.

"'Don't tell me you've—you have not——!' She said he could hardly speak for his tight pale lips; he sort of hissed these words out, and then, as though he had gone properly mad, he lifted her bodily and, screaming out:

"'You're not a—a b—— ——?' threw her with all his force against the couch.

"She fell heavily with her breath gone, choking with terror of him. And, seeing her like that, the devil left him and he fell beside her sobbing out a plea for forgiveness. I must hurry, Rosa. This hurts. She wrote me that they cried together and then Ben went away till dark. She went to bed quite ill.

"He came back a strange man, she said. He wasn't Ben at all. He stood beside her bed and looked down on her grim and forbidding as a spectre

of death and she knew at once with an awful sinking that he had at last found the full complement of his manhood, had at last achieved strength of purpose, stability of mind.

" The expression is my own, Rosa, of course ; of what I gathered from poor Jessie's tear-stained letters. I was really surprised at the manner in which she expressed herself though. She wrote that he looked like the big road-roller she used to love to watch from her window at work ; and she knew that she was about to be crushed under the weight of his purpose as surely as the boulders of the street crumbled to dust beneath the remorseless iron of the machine. He said, quite calmly, without preliminary :

" ' You've got to have a child. I was a fool not to have seen it before.' She sat up abruptly.

" ' I will not ! I will not ! You wouldn't agree when I wanted to and I will not be just a convenience for you to use as you like ! ' He reiterated as calmly :

" ' You shall have a child.' She grew hysterical. She attempted to leave her bed ; with the idea of dressing and running away. He prevented her. She fought him. She scratched his face. She bit the blood from him. But he held her until she had spent herself and when she lay exhausted within his arms, he repeated inexorably :

" ' You shall have a child.' "

* * * * * *

The woman in God's Acre was quietly sobbing. The man lay still for a long time. By and by:

"Ben came and told me, in a garbled fashion. It was no use me trying to thrash him. He was too big. He saw me off when I left for Sydney. The bleakness of his face——

"We are still pals, Rosa. They both write regularly. The kiddy is splendid-looking, they say. She is happy enough, now——

"As for me——. There is always the movement." Again a silence, and then one by one the various clocks of the city tolled out the hour of midnight. The woman Rosa reached out motherly arms and gathered up the slim, stooping shoulders to herself.

"Poor old Jack!" she whispered. And then again: "Poor old Jack! And the poor little woman! I weep for her! I cry for her! It is hateful to hurt a woman, Jack! You must not hurt a woman!" And he, the man——

"And she was not smart at all. She was not smart at all."

THE SPRINGS OF HUMAN ACTION

The Socialist was in one of his intolerant, intolerable moods. Usually he was a likeable sort of chap; companionable, even tempered and immensely interesting. But there were times when his ever-ready, whimsical satires were summarily discarded for a brutal disclosure of the facts of life as he saw them; when his dry, pleasant manner fell from him like a disguise to expose the hard reality compounded of desires and aspirations dammed by his understanding.

In these moods he was distinctly obnoxious to his companions. Of course the most of them liked to be called "socialistic," for a little magic air of intellect and superiority clung to that condition in their environment, the West Coast mines of New Zealand. But there were limits, they considered, to the socialist philosophy. All very well to convert the world from a place where the idle capitalists had all the good things to a place where the workers had them, and the bosses were put to work; it was natural for a man to sympathize with that sort of "science," but when it came to, say, a question of a man's home, or his marriage, well, then it was

time to discuss limitations. This rot the Socialist was talking now.—It angered some of the miners who were seated with him around the big open fire in the hut. Others were uneasy; the four card-players at the card table behind, cast peculiar side-glances at him from time to time.

"Isn't it possible for you to follow a thing out to its logical conclusion?" he demanded hectoringly. "You can't limit science! You can't annihilate a fact by denying it or refusing to recognize it! For Christ's sake face the facts of life and accept them! And if you've got the guts deal with them!"

"What do you mean by that? Deal with them! How deal with them?" asked an elderly man with the drawn throat and emaciated face of the "dusted" quartz miner. He coughed, then added: "You said that under capitalism our wives were just our property, like our tools; that the socialist philosophy establishes that. Suppose we accept your word for it—. How could we deal with it? How do you?"

"Well, you can deal with it in two ways. You can arrogate to yourself every freedom your economic position allows and restrict your wife in the same proportion. The law will allow you to do that. That action would be quite logical and right and moral according to present-day ethics. Or you can do as I do—. Apply the morals of the future regime to your own individual case to-day. Refuse to make a woman your chattel by tying her

to you legally; regard her as a human being like yourself with all the rights and privileges of a human. And that doesn't mean only those rights and privileges which you demand for yourself. You might be the sort of man that asks very little of life; she might be the sort of woman that wants a lot, that needs a lot from life. She might need other men, for instance——"

A chorus interrupted him here, some voices jeering, some sarcastic, some plain angry. They all knew his marriage was not legalized, of course. That did not matter, though they would rather he did not speak openly of it—savoured of disrespect to the woman—but the last item, "she might want other men"——

But the Socialist dominated them.

"That's right! Bellow like calves when your own property instinct is scratched! It is all right to deprive the capitalist of his privilege but don't put a hand on your own. Oh, no! Hypocrites! Ignoramuses!"

They listened now, frostily.

"How many of you men here, the married ones," he looked round the twenty odd men, "are unfaithful? You all are. I am myself. But one mustn't even mention unfaithfulness in connection with your wives. Property instinct! The capitalist will sacrifice his sons in war to protect his property; you workers will commit murder to protect your property interests in your wives." He stopped

moodily. "People that make trouble over love matters ought to be shot."

The men near him exchanged shifty glances. Then one of the card-players, a big dark fellow, took up the conversation while he swiftly dealt the cards.

"So you don't object to it in your wife Jimmy?" he asked. There was a queer note in his voice. In the quiet that fell on the room with the asking of that question, the Socialist caught that queer note. He whirled with astonishing quickness, caught the other's eye suspiciously and answered significantly:

"I will not object if my wife ever is."

The other's look dissolved in a bland smile.

"Just so!" he said quietly, and turned away.

A breath of relief seemed to settle on the atmosphere of the hut. The Socialist was sensitive to it and frowned. But he added:

"I'd be a nice sort of cur if I did. So would you." He knew enough of the other's "frivolities."

Just then the door opened to admit a young man of handsome, boyish appearance, a particular friend of the Socialist's. At once the same card-player greeted him with:

"Hallo, Bill! Jimmy here has just told us that he won't object if his wife goes wrong."

A heavy flush suffused the face of the newcomer.

He stopped uncertainly and glanced from one to the other.

"Wha-at?" he quavered.

The Socialist felt an unaccountable venom rise up in his throat, a compound of many emotions. He was puzzled, for one thing; he felt he was being "ragged," and he could not see why; but he was mostly the victim of a peculiar, unpleasant new sensation for which he had no name. He looked around, searching for a clue. The old quartz miner avoided his eye and leaned over to cough. So he turned to the man at the table and sneered:

"You seem to find my opinions very amusing to-night. You know, there's not much to choose between the men and the women in this little burg, Phillips."

The other sprang up, sending the cards flying.

"And what the hell do you mean by that?" he spat out.

But the newcomer interposed. He stepped between the two and clapped a hand on the Socialist's shoulder.

"Aw, cut it out. What sort of talk is this, anyhow? You ought to be ashamed! The night's only beginning. Come and have a game at my hut, Jimmy."

There was a general move; things had got too lively. The whole incident had been extraordinary and the older men were a trifle serious. Eventu-

ally only two single men were left sitting alone by the fire.

"Funny, you know," one remarked to the other. "Sex is a queer thing—the way it takes men."

"The way it takes husbands, you mean," the other corrected.

The Socialist refused the proposed game of cards, however, saying he would get along home. He went off alone along the gritty coke path that traversed the crooked street and as he walked he tried to shake off his queer perturbation by getting an understanding of it. Why had he made that remark to Phillips? It had popped into his head and out of his mouth before he had got its meaning. Its meaning was unmistakable, he saw now. God! What a thing for him to say! It really meant that Phillips had been getting at his, the Socialist's, wife, and he had understood and retaliated by showing up the other woman. "There was not much to choose between the women and the men." True enough, so far as Phillips' wife was concerned, but as for his own——. The Socialist felt himself an unmitigated blackguard. How could he explain to those chaps? Nohow. It couldn't be done. He had stigmatized his own wife, and she about the only young wife in the place that a man could trust. And so pretty, too, so popular. He loved to pop in at the dances sometimes, just to see the way the fellows sought her as

a partner. (He did not dance. He preferred to philosophize.)

Again, why had he said it ? Something had been called for, he thought even now, by the peculiar note in Phillips' voice, but anything but that ! Taking up the man in a way that he could never have meant. For Phillips was not a bad sort. A good woman was a good woman to him ; nothing could have been further from his mind than an insinuation against the Socialist's wife. He had an animus against the Socialist's ideas, that was all, and was probably " shi-acking " him to judge of the sincerity of his views. Well, he would show them, if ever the opportunity arose. Just let that dear little girl claim the privilege he usurped for himself and he'd show them ! It would be hard of course, but he'd do it. Well, the incident was finished. No use dwelling on it.

Yet the flavour of it clung around him as though he had not understood ; had not sifted it sufficiently. He had a passion for analysis.

He passed by a house from which a great deal of noisy merriment proceeded. He stopped and listened and, recognizing various voices raised in laughter and snatchy song, smiled and turned back. It was early yet, not nine o'clock, and he knew Margie would not be home till twelve. This was one of her dance nights. She had gone off to a little settlement three miles away, to a weekly affair. The unpleasant episode in the hut had up-

set his routine. Other dance nights he chatted and played cards in the big hut with his cobbers till eleven at least.

He knocked at the front door of the house determined to be gay, but the itch of the incident persisted, in spite of himself, a rowel to his temper.

The crowd at the house were mostly "homies." Usually the Socialist enjoyed their strange speech, their vulgar ways of making merry, but to-night the unmusical dialects of Lancashire and Cornwall disgusted him. He had even lost his taste for their beer—and it was proverbial that the "homies'" beer was as good as New Zealand's, anyhow. They were lavish "shouters," more spendthrift than the New Zealanders in this direction, a little overcome by the big wages of the new country which to the native miner were small, hardly sufficient for his higher standard of living. They pressed the Socialist to sing in their routine manner.

All would fill their mugs or cups or glasses with beer. Then one of the women would sing out jovially: "Now so-and-so will sing for us. Won't he?" All would take up a chorus:

"Of course he will! Of course he will!" in a regular chant. They would all drink. Then the woman would call:

"Didn't he say he would? Didn't he?" The chorus:

"Of course he did! Of course he did!" Another drink. The woman:

"He said he would?" The chorus:

"And—he—will!" In a great voice and with a mighty clapping of hands.

The person called on never failed to respond unless he was a "no-sport," in which case he would be left out of the next re-union. The Socialist responded. He got to his feet and sang "Barney Google" with great success. He was the cleverest fellow in the place and found it easy to introduce local personalities into his song, to the great edification of his audience. The women screamed with laughter and all pounded on the table.

But the Socialist could not stomach it for long. Even in the midst of his song, Phillips': "so you don't object to it in your wife" and the queer note in his voice recurred to him, and once when it happened—. A gush of fiery fluid seemed to shoot from his heart to his brain, to whiz around in his head, deafening him so that he lost the sound of his own voice; blinding him. He got away in half an hour.

Back in the night air he doggedly resolved that he would have this thing out with himself. Something was wrong with him apart from the ass he had made of himself and Phillips' "shi-acking." What?

The Socialist's pet formula was "be honest. Don't try to evade disagreeable facts." He was proud and fond of his honesty which others did not

like. Well, he would not shuffle here. This new experience must be analysed and pigeon-holed against future necessity. Just for a second the Socialist felt a wish to be like those other chaps, wrapped around with the safe old usages of custom. Life was simple to them. They followed the blind trail of their emotions; felt no urge to set up precedents; no call to adapt their daily life to science. But he suppressed the wish as the plaint of a coward. They were common men whom aspiration had never even brushed with the tip of its wings. He was the Prophet, the blazer of new trails; a unit of the vanguards leading the hosts of Progress.

The Socialist felt himself rise on the wings of his faith in himself; in his stark acceptance of whatever conditions, whatever trials of the flesh and spirit his exalted position as leader might impose. In the impulse of his quickening spirit he freely and exultantly caught up the truth of the episode that had passed and dealt with it. Dealt with it on the heights of his momentary spiritual flight, forgetting that his feet still heavily trod the earth. It was his way, the unconscious sophistry of the Visionary who cleaves to his ideal with the fervour that even reason finds invincible.

He had been jealous. That queer note in Phillips' voice; his friend's flush and embarrassment, the general feeling in the hut, had awakened suspicion in him, suspicion of his wife, of his Margie, who had

never once, in all the ten years of their life together, betrayed so much as a hint of unfaithfulness, or even of discontent. And that suspicion had engendered jealousy. He would have taken his oath that jealousy was an emotion impossible to him. Had he not thought out the matter of sex relations in all its ramifications? He and Margie together had discussed every phase of sex and agreed that jealousy was impossible where understanding existed. He filled with love and pride in his Margie at thought of her wise words on the subject. Well, he had that night discovered that there were more springs to human action than he had thought.

He wanted to forget that gush of fiery fluid to his brain. Jealousy had taken him unawares. He had not recognized the emotion at its inception. Strange how the male in him had reacted to Phillips without apprehension by his brain. But now that he understood, now that he recognized his vulnerability, never again! Recognition meant control; meant that he could apply his understanding, his socialist philosophy, to the matter and so inhibit jealousy. He could reason it away the same as any other complex the cause of which was understood.

He must recognize that Margie might sometimes want other men, just as he had wanted other women. Of course it was hardly likely, scarcely possible, seeing that she was getting on in life now, and had been faithful for ten years.

For all the talk he and Margie had had on this

subject of sex, he saw now that they had merely played with the thing. He had glibly enunciated heroic principles and lines of action and she had seconded them. But he at least, had not recognized till now the real possibility of being called upon to vindicate those principles. Funny that, he thought, in view of his own unfaithfulness.

Well, he did realize it now and perhaps it was just as well. He wanted to stand on solid ground. If this incident had not awakened him he might have come slapdash up against the real thing some day and done something rash, made a fool of himself, done something in opposition to his principles that would have damned him for ever in his own sight and that of his kind.

His spiritual wings were beating their way to earth again when he ran into a lady friend; a special lady friend who greeted him gaily and detained him with small talk. The Socialist was feeling rather at a loose end now, so was nothing loth to linger. It was Saturday night; no work to rise early for on the morrow, and Margie was not home. His emotions had been titillated, too, by his upset, so before very long he was pleased at the encounter. The woman, rather pretty, with the volatile attraction of the promiscuous among her sex, had many times before given practical evidence of her preference for the Socialist. They soon sauntered away into the dark.

But the exigencies of domestic life hurried the

woman home ; so it was still early, not ten o'clock, in fact, when the man approached his own front door. His thoughts were lingering on the little sexual interlude, pleasantly, for the Socialist liked his comforts, the thread of his own satisfactory domestic relations winding among them. A lucky beggar, certainly, to have landed a woman like Margie. All the same he could have—have done more—for his principles—have given a better lead, perhaps, if he had been called on personally to vindicate his philosophy. His honesty recognized that. Oh, well, it might come yet. If Margie ever said she wanted another man he would fade out of the picture with a " good luck, old girl," if it broke his heart. It would, too, just about.

It struck him here (really, the night was one of revelations for the Socialist) that he had not given Margie the chance to decide whether she would care to " fade out." He flushed in the darkness, and stayed his steps a little to consider this. Why had not he ? Certainly he had not deliberately decided to hide his unfaithfulness from her. No, it was custom, the damnable habit in the man, making of it a thing of no importance, calling for no particular attention, and yet——. If Margie did it, he would expect her to come to him at once, before she actually committed herself, indeed, to save him from the baseness of " cuckolddom," to allow him the exhibition of heroic magnanimity in effacing himself, in handing her over. If Margie did it it

would mean the entire readjustment of their lives —to him—a cataclysmic force ; an eruption that could do no less than bury the whole delightful companionship of their ten years together beneath its lava.

The Socialist winced. He could not escape that other habit—honesty, nor his passion for analysis. He saw that now for the first time he was really honest about his sex relations with Margie. He saw that all his clatter of principles, which in themselves were solid, had been hypocrisy. Only ten minutes before he had sauntered off into the dark with another woman, had quaffed at the cup of sex delights with her and without even bothering to justify himself—. A mere nothing, a pleasant little incident not worth causing Margie a moment's trouble. But if she—. Was he so much different from those other chaps after all ? He broke out into a sweat. Perhaps here was the reason for that queer note, the strange attitudes of the fellows. They realized his hypocrisy and despised him. They made no pretensions of unordinary sex principles, even if they were socialists : the old double standard was good enough for them. Yes, he had been different but not enviably so. He had boasted of virtues they knew he did not possess ; he had thundered forth principles they knew he did not act up to. He had been dishonest. He had practised their way of life while hypocritically pretending another. They all knew that Margie

was faithful to him while he was unfaithful to her.

The Socialist saw himself as very small goods indeed. But he bucked up in no time. For it was finished now, that hypocrisy. He only needed to understand to act. It seemed that theories and philosophy were not enough in themselves. One had to have the practical experience of life in order to deal with it. But the practical experience was useless without the philosophy. Right action necessitated understanding—of causes. The reason why ordinary people were always botching their sex relations was because they were ignorant of the fact that the morals and sex life of the period were resultants of its economic life. Those people were unable to apply reason. But he and Margie were different. He would tell her as soon as she came home and if she finished with him would take his medicine.

But the Socialist did not really think it would be so serious as that. After all, women did not feel these things as men did. Male supremacy down through the ages had bred in woman a tolerance of the mate's faithlessness that that same supremacy had inhibited in man. He and his kind stood for sex equality in man and woman and knew it would be a feature of the future regime, but the very philosophy upon which their ideals were based taught them appreciation of the actual existing relations. Margie would probably cry and forgive him. And he would cut out the other women.

. It was the rotten life they were compelled by conditions to live. No refinements, no amusements other than dancing which he hated (a good job Margie liked dancing, it kept her occupied). And the women of the mines were forced to seek some sort of excitement outside the squalor of their horrible tin shacks. (He and Margie occupied a fairly decent little house.)

Then in the contradictory way of thoughts he decided that there was really no reason why he should have lapsed in the matter of marital fidelity, for Margie was a passionate woman ; always ready, usually seeking, in fact. He had sometimes thought that perhaps a little, just a tiny fraction less sexuality would have improved her. What was it that woman had told him that night. Oh, that one man was no good to a passionate woman. And he, probably with Margie latent in his mind, had told her laughingly to speak for herself. But Margie, bless her, was in love with him. Perhaps that constituted the difference in the two women. He hoped she continued so.

He had come to a stop a few yards in front of his home to finish his soliloquy in the night air. Now he made to go on but his steps were arrested again by a gleam of light which shot athwart the night from a side window of one of the back rooms, Margie's bedroom. (They occupied separate rooms.) Someone in there had suddenly struck a light. The Socialist was surprised. Margie must

be home and it only ten o'clock! What had happened? She could not have just entered either, for he had plain view of the road leading to the back door. Why had the light only just flashed on? He hurried to the little front porch and fumbled for the knob of the door, his shoes clattering on the board floor. As he pushed the door back he heard a sort of scuffling from the back, from Margie's bedroom. He stood still and called out:

"Is that you, Marge?" but already his extreme sensitiveness had caught an inkling of peculiarity, of untowardness, and the half-second of dead quiet that followed his call stirred a clamour in his mind of a thousand questioning incoherent voices. Before he knew it he was at her door, turning the knob. It was locked. But he heard the key turn and it opened on the instant, disclosing Margie—Margie clad in nothing but a clinging woollen body garment. Her back was to the dull kerosene light.

The Socialist did not know what to say. He felt flustered as though he had done something wrong. He wanted to ask why she had locked her door, an unprecedented thing as far as he knew, but instead tried to smile and stammered:

"Hallo, Marge! What's wrong. It's only ten o'clock."

"I—I got a headache at the dance and came home," she answered, and the quavery note of her first word or two struck a chill to the heart of the Socialist. Then she added briskly: "But you

are early, too. I was just getting into bed. Didn't expect you till your usual time."

"I'll get you a cup of tea if you've a headache," the man said slowly, jingling some coins in his pockets and staring at her. She came close and threw her arms around his neck.

"Do, there's a dear, Jimmy. The fire will only need a poke. I banked it well."

He did not stoop at once to her lips as he usually did but let his eyes wander up and down her pretty arms, over her neck. Then he kissed her mouth slowly. He did not enjoy that kiss. It seemed stale, somehow. He thought that perhaps he had spent himself on the other woman. He continued to stare into her face. She patted his cheek with a rough little hand and asked:

"What are you staring at me like that for, you old owl? Haven't been drinking, have you? I can smell beer."

He pushed her away suddenly, none too gently.

"I can smell something too,—and it isn't beer," he said grimly.

"Well, you can't smell anything on me but powder," she answered sharply, a trifle defiantly.

He knew she had deliberately misunderstood him.

What was the matter? The Socialist felt that the whole world had turned over that night. Something was the matter with Margie! She knew that he thought so too, and was "stalling" him. She faced him with real defiance now. He felt a queer

prickling all over his body but mostly at the roots of his hair. His tongue ran over and over his lips. Something seemed to be piling up on him; something grotesque, laughable but hideous. He felt that there was a way of escape from it, too, but could not marshal his faculties sufficiently to take that way. He saw fright spring up in her eyes and did not know it was born of the fearsome aspect he himself was assuming.

She looked so lovely, standing there almost nude, so gloriously intimate. Her bustered golden curls were tumbling everywhere, almost into the eyes which were fearfully holding to his.

But the Socialist suddenly felt as though her nakedness were sinister, bad. He wanted to cover it up. It seemed that other eyes were looking at her, too; men's eyes, lewd eyes, chasing all over her coral body that had to be only his.

"Where's your nightdress?" he ripped out. A slow pallor spread over her face, down over her neck. She glanced around helplessly, then plucked up and with a show of bravado answered:

"It's none of your business where my nightdress is. What's the matter with you, anyhow? You're mad! Get out into your own room! You must be drunk."

"Put on your nightdress!" he ordered harshly, feeling himself mad, right enough, in some strange way, but unable to help himself. There was something he had to admit to himself and he would do

it better if he could not see her body. He trembled with awful emotion and stepped across the room to pick up her nightdress, which he could see lying in a heap on the floor beneath the open window. But she stepped in front of him, saying hurriedly :

" No, not that one. That one is dirty. That is why I didn't put it on. I'll get a clean one."

There seemed to be significance in every thing she said or did, to him. A clean nightdress, even, was suspicious. She was so urgent about it. Why be urgent about a nightdress ? He looked at the one on the floor carefully. There was not much of it ; a yard or two of lawn, yet it looked bulky, somehow, humped up. There *was* something urgent about it ! He looked down into the woman's face, struggling with himself, though he could not get what the struggle was against.

" Jimmy ! " she whispered. " What is it, Jimmy ? "

He threw her aside, bent down and grasped that little heap of lawn and there, lying awkwardly as though they had been dropped in haste, was a pair of man's boots.

The Socialist cackled. No other word could describe his strange cachinnation. And now he could see that her bed behind the door was badly rumpled. He groaned, unawares. Her fear was lost in an access of sympathy. She put her arms around his body below the shoulders and pressed her head into his neck, sobbing :

"Don't take it hard, Jimmy! It doesn't matter! It's only an incident. You should understand, Jimmy. It doesn't matter at all. I love you the same. Darling!"

He shook himself and loosened her hold; coughed again and again to expand his throat against the iron band that had closed around it. His head was clearing now. He was marshalling his faculties and making for that way of escape. Reason, understanding—. The male in him had blotted them out but now that he was himself again—.

Why in hell hadn't she covered herself up?

The cloud of hateful unreason descended upon him again. His gaze tore up and down her loveliness as if to brand her in every part with the fire of his jealousy. He saw her with the other man's eyes of lust; saw her—. Jesus Christ! Could his life go on with that picture in his soul? Up from his heart to his brain came that gust of fire to beat in his temples and smear his eyes with red. His hands came up too and out, the fingers curved like talons.

She stifled a scream, dodged him and ran from the room, bringing him to himself with a jerk. What had he meant to do? To strangle her? Margie? By God! He grew limp with sickening, pallid fear. "Margie! Margie!" he cried and sought her hurryingly. She had locked herself in another room but came out at once, wrapping an old coat of his around her as she came. The Socialist

gathered her to him and begged her forgiveness.

" By God, Margie ! By God ! What it is to be a man ! But you should have told me before you did it. Why didn't you ? We always agreed that you would tell me if you liked another man better than me. I'd have let you go." She dropped her eyes from his.

" I don't like him better than you. I don't like him at all, really."

This turned him cold. He looked away from her and tried to get what that admission meant. It was not hard to get. It meant that she was just another—Mrs. Phillips, another like his lady friend of that night. " One man is no good to a passionate woman." The Socialist's soul filled with an anguish unspeakable, the anguish of broken trust in something he had reverenced. He thought of his boasted understanding, of his boasted cynicism. He knew himself now for a little child. His Margie, so good, so kind, so sweet and loving ! He knew so much about women. Too much not to recognize now that Margie was an " old hand " at this game. He grew furiously angry, in a sane manner, at the way he had been " tricked." Phillips' queer note ; all the rest of it. He let her go suddenly, saying coldly :

" I'll get you that cup of tea." She followed him out into the kitchen and sat down by the table, wondering visibly, gauging his temper. He poked the fire viciously through the bars. He

hated himself and her ; hated everyone and everything for the hash the incidents of that night had made of his preconceived notions. His fetishes had failed him ; his reason and understanding. An escape ? A warden-ship ? He understood right enough. He wished he didn't. He knew, now that he was himself again, that this thing did not make Margie bad any more than his own adultery had made him bad. He could even admit that probably her sweetness, her graciousness, was born of the very sexuality that had demanded " more than one man." He could admit, even then, in his honesty, but Oh, the hell of bitterness the admission opened up for him ! His very understanding caged him, his reason. Inhibited him from easing his hurt by punishing her, by leaving her, by believing in her " badness," as those other common fellows would do. His principles, which he had imagined would be his safeguard, his protection, were proving instead a rack. He and his kind believed in the absolute sex equality of man and woman, believed in freedom of action for the individual. Well, Margie had only emulated his own example. He was caged. But here he remembered that she did not know of his adultery. This perked him up a lot ; promised him some legitimate satisfaction. He would tell her of his own adultery. That would hurt her as hers had hurt him. Childishly he gloated over his power to hurt her as she had hurt him. He filled the little

copper kettle at the sink, put it on the fire and then sat upon the table near her. He leaned towards her with a harsh laugh.

"Well, Margie," he began, but before he could get any further the relish of his intended announcement dropped away. He was chilled and his intention crushed out of him by the sudden realization that it would give him no satisfaction at all to tell her. No satisfaction at all! How was that? Oh, the Socialist knew, right enough, what it was. The very next instant he had recalled the fiat of society that the man's adultery mattered nothing because it signified nothing, but the woman's was the crime of crimes because it made for ambiguity of descent in a "property" world. He understood that the inherited instincts of the ages were transcending the power of his reason and knowledge. It did not matter one whit if Margie knew of his own adultery, not from the point of view of his sufferings over hers. There was no ease for him, no surcease anywhere. He remained leaning towards her with his mouth open, gathering up and reflecting in his eyes the terror born of this complete realization.

The woman could not understand his expression. She looked puzzled and piteously sympathetic.

"Oh, Jimmy, how can you take it like this? It isn't reasonable. Think of your own women, Jimmy. Have I ever fussed over your women?"

It seemed æons to the Socialist before he took

that in properly. At last he asked queerly: "So you knew—of my women? You knew?"

"Why, yes, Jimmy. I've always known. I knew the first time, I believe." She reached out a hand and stroked his head. "I knew— We have been very happy together, Jimmy.—I understood.

"Well, well," said the Socialist. He got off the table, went to the dresser and brought two cups to the table; then went back and got two saucers. She had understood, ay? He understood now, too, by God, but it affected him differently. However, she was right; her attitude was the only one if they were to continue living together. He must conquer himself. What was she saying?—"Make too much of this silly sex act. It doesn't mean anything, really. It is the smallest thing in life. It takes up only a moment or two out of millions of moments. The things that matter are comradeship, congeniality, friendship and kindness. You have told me this a hundred times, Jimmy. But we shall have to separate if you are going back on all your own philosophy."

The Socialist mechanically put the cups in the saucers, then took out a handkerchief and wiped his brow.

"You are quite right, Margie," he said. "Quite right."

She rose and went to him, drew down his head and kissed him. He returned her kiss, feeling

better now, a little. Then the kettle boiled over and she turned to the stove. The Socialist thought: "She must be right. I must apply reason. If reason can't triumph over emotion, mind over matter, there is no hope for the world. No hope—no hope——" The last words struck into him like a knell. In a second their meaning seemed transmuted into opposite significance. No hope—no hope!

Margie had bent down to the hearth to dust it. She was so tidy and methodical. The Socialist looked at her and thought dully, to the accompaniment of that "no hope," "I'll make the tea." Margie knocked the poker from the fender to the floor at his feet. It clattered and the Socialist stooped and lifted it out of her way. No hope! What was it he had said? Oh, no hope for the world if Science——. SCIENCE!!! He clutched at his throat with one hand. Something was happening to him. He felt it and struggled—some hideous thing was creeping into his brain; like hot wine, exciting him; like myriads of maggots, torturing him. His eyes turned inwards and saw pictures in his brain, pictures of men's eyes, lewd eyes, lust-inflamed eyes; of hands clutching at naked women. No, not women; just woman, and that woman was Margie, his Marge! Science!!! The Socialist laughed maniacally, to himself. He thought his laughter pealed out like cracked bells and echoed round the world, it

was so loud, but really he made no sound. But he did not want to laugh. Laughter would not stop the gnawing maggots in his brain; the hot wine sizzling; the men from pawing at his naked Margie. There was something else he had to have! What was it, ay? Let him be quiet, just one second, and it would come to him. It was very close, he knew. Right beside him; at his feet; in his hand. Ah! He knew! He had it!

No hope if science failed, ay? Well, he—had hope—had surcease from his torment. The hideous pictures were blotted out; the soft, pulpy maggots withdrew from his brain; the wine flowed like silk, like ribbons of floss, which had somehow entangled themselves in the golden curls of her hair.

She got up off her knees, his Margie, and half turned to speak a word. He saw the softness of her smile, saw the gentle gleam of her wide intelligent eyes. She looked so placid, now, the Socialist thought. It was rather a pity there was no other way. But life.— Ah! she knew he was going to do it! He wished she hadn't turned round. Her horror, her terror, her wild cry of his name! No matter! No matter! No more men would paw her!

Her skull shattered so easily, though the poker seemed so light.

MAORI LOVE

Pehi Matanga allowed his canoe to float idly upon the flat waters of the Sound, a hundred yards from shore. A fishline trailed over the gunwale of the boat, but he gave it no attention. His eyes were centred steadily upon the white house set in the small paddock that led back from the pebbly little beach. Obviously he awaited something.

It was a little after one o'clock of a summer's day; the typical summer day of the Marlborough Sounds, north of Nelson, New Zealand. The scene had the calm of perfect content. The Sound was about half-a-mile wide and curving, its top waters a mirror, its depths a mystery. Pehi faced an island only large enough to constitute one farm. Half of it was still carrying the luxuriant deep green bush of the Sounds; bush that seemed too heavy and inert to stand erect, so leaned down and lapped the water. The other half was cultivated paddocks, used mostly for growing potatoes. The sun that could not penetrate the leafy barriers of the bush took full advantage here. The ground rolled in the opulence of warmth; warmth that the waters preserved from heat. It was so rich it sucked in and clogged the spade, yet was dry withal.

Opposite this farm lay a larger island, with the dark mass of its humped body still virgin. Only the line along the shore front had been cleared to allow the Maori settlement from which Pehi Matanga had come to plant its potatoes and onions and cabbages, which with the fish from the Sounds constituted the natives' chief articles of diet. Any other stores were put off once a week by the steamers which plied daily between Nelson and Wellington.

Pehi's fishline jerked so he pulled it in and tossed it in the bottom of the boat without bothering to remove the cod from the hook. Another few minutes of vigilance shorewards and he saw a man leave the back of the white house and go off into the fields. Pehi waited till he was quite a good way off then picked up his oars and with a few vigorous strokes was ashore He pulled the dinghy up on to the pebbly beach and ran lightly up the bank. There he began to saunter nonchalantly.

He was a full-blood Maori of middle height, looking about twenty-four years old. His features and skin showed no trace of the dark Melanesian strain so interwoven in his race. He was pure Polynesian, sturdily built, golden brown of skin, almost Caucasian of feature. His hair was black and wavy, his eyes the deepest brown. Tweed trousers tightly belted round his hips and a woven singlet were all his clothing, with the canvas shoes so much affected by his race. He made for the front of the house and sat down on the veranda, still

whistling but now a trifle louder. He took off a shoe and removed some small object from the toe of it, very leisurely. Footsteps sounded within the house and Pehi's eyes gleamed.

A white woman came to the front door, leaned against it and regarded Pehi discontentedly. She was a big woman, blonde, and though not handsome, attractive for the freedom of her bearing, her virility and jovial spirit. Obviously the discontent was a passing humour and a bother to her. Pehi did not look up or speak, so by and by she said :

" Pehi, what are you sitting out here for ? The woodpile is at the back." He looked up at that, straight into her eyes, and rose.

" When I feel like chopping wood—I chop it. When I don't—I don't," he said.

Her discontent vanished in a laugh and she moved over to him, sat down on the veranda and swung her feet over the edge boyishly. She was dressed in an old dark cotton gown and very little else, because of the warmth. Her big body was ungraceful ; her breasts, big and full, hung jerkily unsupported by corsets. But Pehi did not look at her. He stood straight and still, staring over her head, hurt and cold-looking. Not that her unweildy body would have offended his taste. He loved it. It was akin to the unshapeliness of the women of his own race. She looked up and laughed again.

" Sit down, Pehi, you old goat." He looked

down at her with dignity, unrelaxed. But she pulled at his trousers and went on gaily:

"You're not a prince, you know, Pehi, after all." He interrupted her, to her surprise.

"No, I am a Maori." There was rebuke and magnificent pride in his simple retort.

She was silenced for a moment, then her eyebrows went up and her tongue into her cheek, though she turned her face from him.

"Oh, bless him! Bless the boy!" she said to herself, but she liked him, liked him greatly, so stood up and with a hand on each of his shoulders, tried to force him down.

At her touch Pehi started, then his hand went up and caught one of hers. It was the first time she had touched him. His big brown eyes, so steady and childlike for all their dignity, sought hers with eager question.

"Now, Pehi, my dear. Now, Pehi," she said gently, but playfully, though a hot flush dyed her white skin. She lifted his hand off with her other.

"Mustn't do that, Pehi dear. You know, you are altogether too nice for a woman to play with." He made a catchy soft sound in his throat, and the appeal in his face turned her suddenly weak. She sat down abruptly.

For she wanted to kiss him, wanted to badly. He was so lovely and she was so starved.—Her loneliness! the warmth of the sun! the opulence all around! She had wanted to kiss him before,

many times, but never so much as now. She sat down abruptly and bowed her head.

Pehi sensed her desire. Not a hard thing to do, for her passions were strong as her body and she was childishly inexperienced emotionally. She was the simple woman of the backblocks whose way of life had developed no artifice.

Pehi was simple, too, and he had wanted her for a long time. Ever since she had come to live there the preceding summer indeed. Pehi had had white girls in Nelson while he had been at college there, and ever since he had been unable to conceive desire for the women of his own race. White women had been the content of his dreams whenever his mind had strayed sexwards. Which, to do Pehi justice, had not been often.

Now for the first time he felt that this woman was responding to him, but he did not know just what to do. He was afraid even yet of her married state, though he had learned, of course, that the monogamic marriage of the whites was by no means the sacred condition that the pairing family relation of his own race was. Pehi would not have dreamed of making love to a married woman of his own race. The whites could do as they liked. They were funny people anyhow, and not of his blood. It was not his business to question their customs, their easy morality. He knew white married women had lovers. That was enough for him. He had never pushed himself, nevertheless,

on Mrs. Ballinger. It was not the Maori way to risk a rebuff. He had just let her know his desire, proudly though subtly, and waited for her to respond, if she ever would. Every fine day he had come to chop wood for her, knowing that otherwise she would have to do it herself as her consumptive husband was weak. Many times she had hurt his pride, that marvellous pride of the savage, as she had done to-day, but Pehi had forgiven for the sake of his love, for the sake of his hope that some day she would take him to mate.

But he was shy even yet. He had waited so long and the knowledge that she was sitting there trembling for him was so heavy with sweetness that Pehi felt cloyed with it; movement was difficult. He thought she would do something, or say something if he waited.

She did, but her words puzzled Pehi and disappointed him. She seemed to drop the passionate moments which to him were as golden and precious as his own skin, right out of existence. She ceased to tremble. The Maori shrank into himself and did not answer her:

"I wish white men had your pride, Pehi."

Mrs. Ballinger knew that Pehi wanted her, though she was incapable of understanding the force of his passion; but she had not regarded it as important until now when she felt herself returning it; or rather, now that she felt she could fall in love with the beautiful Maori if she let herself go.

Her remark had been prompted by the mixup in her mind of her husband's querulousness, his pettiness, and Pehi's dignified demeanour and speech. Ballinger had been particularly peevish at lunch time; he hated the solitude to which his own malady condemned him, and manlike, or white-manlike, his wife thought, relieved his temper by allowing it to percolate through her good nature. Her discontent returned at thought of him, sharpened now by her longing for Pehi.

"My husband has no pride at all, Pehi. He is like a child. I wish . . ." She was going to say she wished she were married to Pehi, but here it struck her that it was time she dropped the habit of regarding this man as unimportant except as a reflex for her own moods. She would have said it and counted it nothing. Pehi did not matter. He was a Maori. But now she realized that, Maori or not, Pehi was a man and a man she mightily desired at that moment.

She stopped, but he guessed the unfinished sentence, for though it stayed on her tongue it leapt from her eye. And Pehi was not going to be defrauded a second time. He was sure now. He went straight for her mouth with his.

She gasped—but received it voluptuously. How starved she was! How starved! For life—and —love—and passion! Mrs. Ballinger did not tell herself this in so many words. She was the simple farmer type whose prudery inhibits the use of such

words as "love" and "passion." But she felt it in every fibre of her. The consumptive in his lonely room! She in hers! For years now. Her strong body and voluptuous temperament doomed to the celibate's bed.

For a moment she was beside herself with the uprush of ecstasy at his soft full lips upon hers. Pehi's passion dazed her. His kiss was not at all like the chaste salutes she had known from the white man, even in the first years when the two had been really in love. Pehi's passion sent her crazy, for a second—a long second. But then Pehi got too pressing and recalled her to herself, to her surroundings, to a certain aspect of the matter that the woman in her could not be blind to even at that moment. And this aspect of it chilled her. She thrust Pehi back with one push of her great arm and dabbed at her hair into which he had thrust his fingers.

"Go away! Go away, Pehi! Go home! Right away from me!" But she hoped he would not go as she said it, though all her training was rising up in her mind, shocking her, embarrassing her, disturbing her dreadfully. She did not want to look at Pehi, who could scarcely control himself now that the leash was off. He did not go.

"Pehi!" she cried with closed eyes. "I am old enough to be your mother! Go home!"

"No!" he answered fiercely. "I am old enough to give you sons! I won't go home!"

So of course Mrs. Ballinger found refuge and relief in tears. Pehi looked on woodenly while she cried. But soon, feeling quite sure now that she would give herself to Pehi when she got more used to the idea, she dried her eyes, and looked up at him firmly, wondering if her tear-stained face would discourage him, hoping it would not.

He stood the test, staring down at her face, and then suddenly he dropped to his knees beside her and pressed his face against her.

Mrs. Ballinger felt all sorts of emotions crowd upon her. She was only thirty-three but at that moment she really felt old enough to be his mother —and the wish to be. If she had children, now—. That was something she wanted to think about before giving herself to Pehi. She blushed at her own thoughts, shocked at herself. But determined now to go on. She began to feel excitement at the adventure she was about to plunge into. How astounded her husband would be if he walked round the corner of the house and saw them in such a position. In a flash of goodnatured malice she almost wished he would. She lifted Pehi's head very gently and said :

" I am a married woman, Pehi."

" Why, I know that, don't I," he answered simply. " That doesn't count much with white women." She blushed again, experiencing now the nearest approach to shame she had felt throughout.

"Oh, doesn't it? It does with some white women," she laughed. He fell back.

"Does it with you?" he asked fearfully. She could not resist the temptation to tease. And besides, she felt that common decency demanded some show of resistance from her. She would like him to think she had to battle with her virtue before allowing herself to yield. And she had not the faintest conception of the nature of Pehi's passion. She did not know the Maori mind.

"Yes, it makes a lot of difference to me, Pehi." He looked so young, half sitting, half kneeling before her. Just at that moment the whole thing seemed ridiculous. He was such a boy.

"I can't let you make love to me when I've got a husband, Pehi. It would hardly be proper, would it?" Her tone was almost light. She astonished herself with the ease with which she had discarded her training, the conventions.

But Pehi was of a serious turn of mind. He would never have thought of her joking at such a time, or lying. Like all his race he was a glorious liar, but there were things he lied about and things he did not. He rose to his feet now with a face like wood.

"That is true? You will not love me while you've got a husband?" he asked. She thought he had turned sulky. His voice, even, was expressionless.

"Well, no, Pehi. You come back to-morrow

and chop the wood and we'll forget this. Ay ? "

He fell into a brown study. Then all at once his face lit up.

" But he is sick, isn't he ? How long do you think he will live ? One year ? Two ? "

Mrs. Ballinger was taken aback.

" My goodness, Pehi, you mustn't talk like that ! Wishing the poor man in his grave. He hopes to get better. That is why he is here."

Pehi relapsed into gloom. And suddenly, without another word to her, he turned and ran to his boat. She stared after him wide-eyed, then laughed a little and tried to think deeply herself—to think clearly, anyhow. She found it difficult; impossible at first. Now that he had gone her starved body ached for him. Pehi Matanga ! A Maori ! Well, why not ? She felt recklessly, deliciously abandoned. A real romance had fallen to her lot. To her, just one of those ordinary, common farmer women that Bill Massey called the backbone of New Zealand.

She pushed that certain aspect of the matter away from her just yet. Time to think of the fruit when she had ravished the scent of the flower. She stretched herself full length on the hot boards of the veranda and lay with closed eyes, her heart thumping, her limbs heavy with the promise of Pehi's return on the morrow. She had wanted to kiss him before, but never till to-day had thought of the other thing come to her. When her husband's

malady had advanced so far as to bereave him of his manhood she had accepted the condition it imposed on her with hardly a bothersome thought. It had not occurred to her to hanker after sex delights, and if it had she would have thought shame on herself. Sex intimacy was a thing that decent women took with marriage. It was the last thing on earth for a decent woman to desire. That was the ideology of her kind, easily bulwarked by the hard conditions of the average farmer's lot.

But since she had been transplanted from the southern snows and mists to the dulcet glories of the Marlborough Sounds, Mrs. Ballinger had felt herself outgrowing to meet the new conditions of the new environment. Here she had not the toil of the milking sheds to suck her womanhood into its brutalizing maw. Instead of the winter's snows, the summer mists, she had here the gracious loveliness of nature's softest and balmiest moods. Wooded hilly isles, dipping with friendly whispers to the winding infant waters whose roughest play was gentle flowing and loudest voice the murmur of light ripples on the sand.

That spring as she had sat about the tiny beach, helped her husband in the paddock, or fished or rowed about the Sounds, she had felt the burgeoning of new life in her veins too, and, because she was the simple sort that sees only the known and the obvious in life, she had recognized in herself the plain heat with which she had been so familiar

in the stockyards. When she visited the Maori settlement opposite, as she did very often because the natives fascinated her, the children running about plentiful as rabbits stirred her to an all-pervading longing for babies of her own. No bitterness crept into her spirit at the thought that she could never hold her baby to her breast. She was too gracious of spirit, too large in her outlook, to experience bitterness. But her joyful laugh belling out to the children was weighted with regret.

And Pehi Matanga had always been near her, exciting her with his unspoken desires. She had always thought that Pehi was like the Sounds; lovely, softspoken, calm and dignified.

Such a passion of longing and realization overwhelmed her as she lay in the heat of the sun that she suddenly sprang up, determined to call Pehi back. Why had she let him go? How stupid she had been! Willie—(she laughed to herself with scorn at the name. Willie! Suited him, the weakling! Pehi was her man's name now—Pehi, so soft and guttural yet strong,)—Willie would not be back from the fields till tea time. She sprang up and ran down the bank, her heavy full breasts flopping with each stride. She would coo-ee to Pehi to return.

But Pehi and his boat were nowhere visible. She was disappointed but soon the fire of her itch departed and she strolled back to the veranda

with her mind fixed on that certain aspect of the matter.

Children ! She could not cut a little niche in her life for Pehi to cuddle into, as she would wish. Just a peep at this aspect almost terrified her back into her groove. She had medical testimony that herself was the normal woman ; Pehi was splendidly robust. Mrs. Ballinger yearned for the knowledge of the modern young woman. She had not the faintest idea how to circumvent nature's laws. Her union with Pehi, then, must result sooner or later in exposure. She would have to go off with Pehi and his baby.—His brown baby. She would sooner have a white baby than a brown one, of course—. But here Mrs. Ballinger found that the prospect of a baby, any baby, brown or white, filled her with unspeakable joy. It undid her, far more than her eruption of passion, for the flatness and barrenness of her previous existence. Exposure ? What matter ? Who cared ? Let Willie pay a servant to care for him. She knew he resented her strength and goodnature. She would cross to the settlement and settle down with Pehi. She would make him till some of his land. He was lazy ; lived easily like all of his race. She smiled broadly and felt in no time a regular Maori. Their way of life would suit her. Bless the boy ! She wondered where he had disappeared to. He had not had time to cross the Sound.

Pehi had decided to row down to the end of

Ballinger's island and fish off the rocks there, the only rocks in the vicinity, until he had thought out an easy way of getting rid of Ballinger. He thought better, fishing. The trouble with Pehi was that he was too much the son of his race. The woman's word was his law. He would have waited a year, two years, for he was a constant, faithful soul, but if Ballinger was going to get better——.

Pehi thought hard but nothing safe had come to his mind, even after quite a long while. He did not want to bungle it. He knew the foolish value the whites set upon life, no matter how useless. How absurd! That two loving, healthy people like himself and Mrs. Ballinger, should be kept apart by a consumptive. Pehi's ruminations and ideas were all couched in the very best English. He had never used his native tongue.

He was tired of thinking and had concluded that he had better come along there when Ballinger was fishing and push him in (he knew the consumptive fished off the rocks every fine Friday and that he could not swim), when the waters themselves threw up the solution to his problem.

Pehi got a fright; the worst fright he had ever had. The water was very deep and dark right in by the rocks, which were about four feet above water at high tide. The tide was pretty high then. Pehi had caught a number of fish of different kinds and was hauling a big schnapper over the edge of the rocks preparatory to going home with his un-

satisfactory conclusion, when there was a lightning-like flash of something resembling a thick rope—and Pehi's schnapper disappeared back into the water. A few feet of line followed it, jerked spasmodically and then floated.

Pehi had shot backwards with marvellous agility at that flash. He needed no explanation of it. He remained where he fell, to recover from the shock of its appearance, shuddering at thought of the hideous fate he had missed. The bare glimpse of that short length of gristle had sufficed to acquaint him with the size of the octopus. It was a monster, a man-eater. In less than a minute the arm returned, creeping stealthily over the edge this time, worming about.

A horrible idea came to Pehi as he watched those ghastly limbs lifting and coiling in the air, shooting here and there in search of prey. That was Wednesday. Ballinger fished on Friday if the weather was good. The weather never failed at that time of year. Pehi stiffened with the horror of his idea, but only for a moment. Soon he thought it quite a good one and cast away the horror with a fatalistic shrug. One way or another. It would soon be over. After all it was none of his business when or where Ballinger fished. He threw the fish he had caught one by one to the devil's arms, which never failed to return, and when all were gone, he manœuvred round till he could see the thing entirely should it come to the surface. Pehi was subject to

the general fascination these horrible creatures exerted.

After a while, as no more fish were cast to its maw, it broke water and sprawled over the face of the rock, its lower arms trailing. It spread itself out like a web, half round, half oblong, the bulge of its beak opening and closing jerkily, the glare of its round blobs of eyes sending shivers up Pehi's spine. He left it clinging there, sunning itself. He reckoned it would measure twenty feet across from tip to tip.

Mrs. Ballinger half expected him to visit her the next morning. Her night had been sleepless; she was consumed with impatience for his return. She had not been half so excited or happy when as a young bride she had awaited the groom. Naturally, for as a virtuous young bride she had held herself in reserve, fearing to be thought immodest; Willie would have been shocked at passion in a woman, would probably have considered himself defrauded of a proper amount of virtue in his wife. The people of her world did not discuss these things; they sucked knowledge of them in with the air they breathed.

Mrs. Ballinger did not get to moralizing on the matter of her release at all, when she let herself go completely this morning. Oh no! Had she been marrying a white man of her world again the affair would probably have been a repetition of the first. What broke down the barrier was the

"wickedness" of it. Having decided to eschew decency, to relinquish virtue and espouse the ways of the abandoned, she thought she might as well do it thoroughly. So she unlocked the shackles of her mind and let it wander willy-nilly in the luscious latitude of passion. Every second was a marvel to her, a pearl of happiness that slipped swiftly through the mesh of her desire, yet could not lessen quick enough the hours of waiting.

These were the great and glorious moments of Mrs. Ballinger's life. The only kind of greatness and glory possible to her mental, moral and material condition.

When night had come, though, and Pehi had not visited her at all that day, her exhilaration was drowned in a sea of despond and half-angry disappointment. Only half angry because she believed that his pride had kept him away. She knew that his awful pride was liable to break out in any direction. She slept that night, worn out with emotion, and in the morning decided to accompany her husband fishing just to spite Pehi. He would be sure to come to-day, she decided, with the nearest approach to a malicious smile she could manage, and it would serve him jolly well right to find her out.

They left the house at about ten o'clock to walk to the rocks. The way ran over a mile of cultivated paddocks and open ground, then through a quarter of a mile of bush.

At a little before eleven Pehi arrived at the house, having given Ballinger plenty of time, as he thought, to get off. He knew that his lady love must be sadly in want of some firewood by this time. His dismay can be imagined at finding the house deserted. No need to lock up here. Pehi rushed through every room. He had noticed her boat on the shore. She must have gone fishing.

If Pehi merited punishment he got it then. For a second or two he was sick. He vomited violently; his fear and horror being too much for his stomach. Then he snatched up the axe from the woodpile and ran; ran till his heart threatened to burst. But the thought of her—and those grisly arms, those blobs of eyes, that convulsive beak! Pehi sobbed once or twice as he ran, then held his wind for his race. He entered the bush; it was rougher there, but meant he was getting near. Then, just as he was halfway through it, came ear-splitting screeches that ripped and tore into him worse than a thousand horrid beaks. Whether man's or woman's he could not tell. He guessed, both. Pehi, in the succeeding minute, went headlong off the rocks, down beneath the water to wreak vengeance on the "devil" that had taken his love, then to clasp her remains in his arms and die with her. How he ran! The axe was a ton but he dared not relinquish it. He prayed to the gods of his fathers to let it be the man. Then one appalling screech split the air, piled up higher and higher with

undreamed-of agony and broke off sharp at its zenith. So piercing was it that again Pehi could distinguish no sex. But the next instant, when he was almost out of both the bush and his mind, Mrs. Ballinger came running—if running it could be called, her scrambling, bent, blind rush—; and Pehi at the sight of her collapsed. He fell in a heap, unable to murmur or clutch and she dropped on top of him.

"Pehi! Pehi!" she gasped; tried to speak, to tell him, then with a thrust of her hand towards the rocks, fainted away.

Pehi recovered very quickly though he cried like a child for a long time at thought of the fright he had given her. But by the time she came to life he had got quite excited over the success of the business and explained to her dramatically how a chap had told him that morning at the settlement that he had seen the octopus there a few days before and how he, Pehi, had nearly died in his efforts to get there in time to warn them. Never before had Pehi forgotten his dignity, nor delivered himself so eloquently. Why, a year or two back he had been fishing from some rocks himself, over on another Sound, and an octopus had grabbed a whopper schnapper almost right out of his hand.

Mrs. Ballinger let him talk, clung to him, too sick to move, yet dying to get away from those rocks. She would never get over it! Never forget that sight. The floods of anguished tears she shed for

Willie made Pehi a trifle dubious. At last she said :

" I didn't love him, Pehi. To think that this should have happened just when I had decided to leave him and live with you ! You know, Pehi, I made up my mind on Wednesday that I would leave him and live with you. And now——. Oh, poor Willie ! " She bowed her head and wept afresh.

Pehi sat beside her as if turned to stone. Pehi had not wanted to commit murder ; certainly not in that horrible way. He had his feelings, had Pehi. He sat as if turned to stone for a long minute, staring straight before him, his great brown eyes hard as flints ; then he turned his head with a jerk and looked down at the weeping woman.

" Damn ! " says Pehi.

* * * * * *

By and by the Maoris came in force in their boats and captured the octopus. Pehi refused his share of the elastic-like gristle when cooked.

But he made Mrs. Ballinger a good husband and gave her plenty of sons.

THAT " ALMOST "

MADAM stretched her lissom, uncorseted body full out so that her bauble-bedecked satin shoes rested on the high fender. She was supple as a willow wand. Her bobbed ringlets rested gracefully on the low cushioned chair-back and she yawned impudently up into the man's face.

" You are talking nonsense, Guy," she drawled lazily. " You know quite well that I do not allow men to take liberties with me."

He looked down at her, contempt fighting a losing battle with desire in his regard.

" No, by God, but you take liberties with them! I know you don't actually consort with them—you know that I would strangle you if you did——."

She interrupted : " Do you really think that it is fear of you that keeps me free from the odious embraces of those fools ? "

He stared at her, at the mockery of her half-veiled eyes, the cupid's bow of her smiling, carmined lips, with a glint of pearl between ; at the dainty swell of her breasts, artfully and suggestively concealed ; at the ivory white of her back, nude to the waist, disclosed as she lolled about. He stared and then laughed shortly.

"If it is not fear of me, Fleur, I'd like to know what it jolly well is. You would hardly expect me to believe it is virtue, would you?"

Her expression grew hard and cold as ice.

"You cad!" she said softly, between her teeth. "You cad!"

He turned from her violently.

"Cad, eh? I like that! You beat me! Women are the limit! You flirt, tempt and madden men beyond all reason for no use whatever; you take men away from good women, drive them to the point of insanity with your cursed beauty, knowing that once you have brought them to your feet you will baulk them of satisfaction, yet when I, who love you more than all of them together, when I, who keep you and pay for your bedevilments, call your virtue in question, you bite as though you had never raised Cain in the heart of any poor devil." He turned back to her savagely.

"Do you think a woman is worthy of respect simply because she does not actually give herself? Don't you know that each one of your victims despises you utterly? Why, women like you are lower than the poor devils of the street. They only rob men of a little of their strength but your sort robs them of their souls. The French have a word that describes your kind. Look at me! Look what you've done to me! You know what I was when I met you—what prospects I

had ?" He thrust his hands into his pockets as though they might not be trusted free.

"How you came about I can't for the life of me understand. That the little country girl whose beauty I fell for and wanted to marry could have turned out a creature of your type is beyond me. You wouldn't marry me but you've kept me enslaved ; kept me dangling after you for four years, until now I'm nothing but a loafer despised by every man of my own class who is worthy of respect himself.

"But I could stand that for you, Fleur, though why you couldn't marry me and live like any other woman, I don't know, but I can't stand the others any longer ; I can't stand the others any longer, Fleur !"

The savage note was gone entirely. He knelt beside her and stroked the shimmering satin of her gown, causing it to opalesce and quiver in the firelight like some sensitive live thing. He rested his head against her limbs.

The mockery was all gone from her face. A trace of the hardness remained, but mostly she regarded him with thoughtful curiosity.

"Guy !" She called his name sharply. He looked up quickly. "This is a great tragedy, this business of me ? A great tragedy, ay ?"

"It's a tragedy for me all right," he said sulkily. "I don't see any marks of battle on you."

"Just so," she said, her lip curling. "Listen,

and think about what I say, if you can, and answer me truthfully. Have you ever thought that it might be a tragedy for me, also, all this philandering ? Have you ever seriously thought of me in any other way than as a sexual animal ? Have you ever given me anything disinterestedly ? Have you ever considered that I might have interests in life other than those of bodily comfort and sensual pleasure ? That I might have what is called an intellect ? Might, indeed, have brains in my pretty head and a wish to use them ? And have you ever, when using me for gratification of your animal instincts, troubled to inquire if your passion were reciprocated ? No. You were keeping me. You bought my clothes ; bought them beautiful so that I might be more alluring in your eyes and then carped because what looks good to you looks good to other men also. You bought my food and provided me with this suitable habitat for my loveliness ; you added me, another chattel, to your possessions ; you paid me, in your own estimation, full value for what I gave, and so long as I suffered your embrace and returned your caresses, no matter how coldly, you were satisfied.

" But you gave me something else, Guy, too, though you gave unconsciously. Your freely given money enabled me to buy that for myself for which the real ' me ' craved ; that which my poverty-stricken country home denied me and for which I sold myself to you. And that something,

Guy, was learning, development, culture, attainments. You never guessed it, did you? I was always so careful not to hurt your feelings by any unwomanly display of superiority over my goose that laid the golden eggs. Come, Guy, and I will show you why I have insisted on having my mornings and early afternoons to myself; why I have annoyed you so by turning you from me at eleven regularly at nights."

She rose gracefully, and the man, with frowning surprise and slack jaw, followed her to a distant door. She opened it, switched on the light and disclosed to him her study; her desk littered with papers and books.

"This, Guy, is what you gave me in return for my beauty, and so much does this mean to me that I reckon the bargain a fair one.

"You see, Guy, I had hopes of you at first. I had hopes that you would prove yourself a mate for me, a real mate I mean. You had prospects, as you said, worldly prospects, but I valued them not at all. I am of the blood that must hew a path through life for itself—but,—had you possessed stamina, Guy, your passionate liaison with me would never have thwarted your ambitions.

"But you were all animal. You shocked me with your grossness though of course you displayed it in a gentlemanly way. You were pleased to take me at my face value and I gradually learnt that I could keep myself reasonably free from your

odious endearments by stringing other men on in such a way as to repel you.

"Just enough, of course, Guy. I have always known when you could carry no more. It was easier, you see, to sustain your sharp, savage attacks through jealousy than your continual, lingering embraces. Because in those times you always woke a response in me. Almost, but not quite, Guy, for just when I would be on the point of yielding myself, of giving back passion for passion, my contempt for you would intervene and drain my body of the heat which threatened to burst into flame. You had destroyed the promise of your manhood through passion. You have never yet stirred me to the point of forgetting that you were capable of feeling nothing but passion for me—for me, Guy, a woman who thinks herself so far above the common herd that what constitutes degradation for ordinary women is legitimate action for her. You have wounded me in my most vulnerable point, my vanity, my self-love. Never once have you recognized my mentality, never once have you responded to my attempts—few and far between, I admit, Guy because I am proud—to draw you into discussion on the—on the business of life, on the real work of the world. I have been your woman, the pretty one you came to." He interrupted her, stammering.

"I—I wanted to marry you, Fleur. If you had married me—but no, if you had loved me, I

would not have gone to the dogs! I would have raised you to the level of my own class and position——."

She cut in: "That will do. That's enough of that sort of stuff from you. You think yourself so damned honourable and splendid because you have offered me a wedding ring. Why, I could have bought a wedding ring in a shop if I had wanted one, Guy. Where is the difference in my purchase of one and you giving me one?" She gave way to vivid bad temper. "You dared to degrade me to the level of your fashionable sows. A wedding ring and money! But there! It is no use blaming you, I suppose. It is the way of all your kind. Now let me finish. You can have your say afterwards.

"I brought you in here to-night for a purpose, Guy." She rested one hand on her desk and looked down at it thoughtfully for a few moments; then raised her eyes to him again.

"I did not want your position or your class, Guy; I despised them and still do. I did not love you and thought it unnecessary to throw my liberty in with my beauty. But I had hopes, and if you had displayed any interest in the real me, if you had wanted me for the respectable side of me, in short, if you had loved me, as young Paul did, for instance, I would possibly have learnt to love you, mundane and prosy as you are, and have married you——."

"Young Paul!" he exclaimed. He grabbed her arm and thrust his bulldog jaw into her face. Her revelation had flustered him; dismayed him and held him dumb until now; but this touch of tangible reality drove into the quick of the man. She had thrown a buoy into her sea of words that succoured him. He was her mate. She could talk as she liked as between the two of them, and bedevil him with subtleties of sentiment, but just let her focus his jealousy by so much as one word! "Young Paul! What of him, ay?"

"Oh, nothing much. Don't be rough. I'll tell you of Paul in a moment. First, I have something to say about my 'seduction' of men that you spoke of. I have given you one reason for it but there is another. In every man I met, Guy, through you or otherwise, I have looked for my potential mate, for the mate who would wake in me the response you just missed arousing, and who would at the same time appreciate me as an individual apart from my sex. But in the class of man I met, living as I have been living, I have seldom found anything but lust. Their beastliness disgusted me (It seems rather funny that I can't stand any man's hand on me but yours) so I did not scruple to use them to shield myself from you. A few have been quite decent and would have loved me, but they were either nonentities or lacked the virility and physical strength which my life with you has rendered indispensable to me——"

Here a tiny hissing sound floated from the man's lips——. "And those few, Guy, I have never played with, never flirted with. Young Paul was like that. He used to visit me here in the mornings when I was working and plead with me. He would have provided me with all that you have given and asked nothing in return. Do you hear, Guy? Nothing in return."

He grinned.

"He is a puppy, that's why, a snivelling pup. And that's why you stayed with me, my girl, my virtuous Fleur." He kissed her, brutally, then held her tight against him. "Culture and learning may be all right in their way, Fleur; you're welcome to all you can get in that line for mine. I'll send you to any old college you like, but—there's going to be no young Pauls hanging round your bedroom door. You don't know what you are talking about. That's the worst of you damn women; if you've got any brains at all you think it's the monopoly in that line for yours. You're all right. If you had told me all this before there would have been something doing. I know why you have told me now." He thrust her away and held her at arm's length. "This old dog is sharp enough to see through a glass wall. You think you are through with me. Don't you, ay?"

She dragged herself from his hands.

"Yes, Guy. You're not a bad sort, but I've given good value for your money and I'm through.

I've had my first book accepted by a publishing firm and now I'm going out on my own among the men of my own kind to battle. You've fitted me for the fight but you have demanded payment in full so to-night is goodbye."

He stared at her from under heavy brows.

"Come and sit down by the fire, Fleur, and we'll talk it over." She shrugged and followed him.

"Well, Fleur," he began, "I am surely astonished to find you such a clever little woman." He lit a cigar, leant against the mantel-shelf and looked down on her as she lolled back in her low chair. "A book, ay? Some little girl, right enough! And to hide it so cleverly, too! Some girlie, Fleur." He puffed at his cigar for a few minutes.

"Do you know (but of course you do) I had some little ability myself before I developed my—my passion, for you, Fleur. But that sort of settled things for me, little girl. My fountain of wisdom seemed to dry up at its source." He leant towards her. "Do you know why, Fleur? Do you know why? But of course not. Even such a clever, virtuous, lovely little woman as mine can't be expected to know the nature of man. I'll tell you why, Fleur! I'll tell you why I flung my life away and became a loafer on unearned increment through—passion. Oh, Fleur, you may be a clever little woman, but you've overstepped yourself to-night. If you had really wanted to be

rid of me, you should have gone out of my life leaving your image in my mind that of the seductive little she-devil I thought you. You should not have told me of that 'almost,' Fleur. You accused me of not caring whether my passion was reciprocated or not, simply because I did not inquire. You dear little innocent, to think that I needed to inquire. I knew, girl, I knew! And the knowledge nearly drove me mad. I could not leave you alone! You tempted me so——." He paused a moment.

"Now I see why. You wished to give full value while I imagined you to be coldly selling yourself for luxury, and despised you even while I possessed you. Oh, Fleur! The pity of it! If you had only spoken before! You might have given me credit for some decency, some perspicacity."

"I was not ready to tell you before; I had not finished with you. Don't get silly ideas in your head, Guy. This is the end." She rose determinedly. He sat down. She began to show annoyance; bit her lip.

"Don't try to force yourself on me, Guy. I'm capable of taking care of myself if necessary. I can't turn you out of here, since you pay, but I can go myself. But you're a gentleman of sorts so for goodness sake don't let's get melodramatic." She spoke sharply.

"This alliance has been merely a business one on my part. Marriage is woman's trade. The

only difference between our bargain and that of most other couples, at least in your select circle, is that I preserved my freedom. I reserved the right to terminate the arrangement without legal proceedings. The difference is purely legal; bears no relation at all to morals.

"Do you remember telling me two years ago that your sister loathed the man she was marrying but it was too good a snip to lose. I haven't loathed you, Guy. I detested sexual intimacies, and despised you for allowing what seems to me mere animality to dominate you, but I could not have endured our embrace had I not liked you in a way. And I felt you were a one-woman man. That counted for a lot. Your money for the satisfactions my beauty gave you, Guy. Now it's over, that's all."

"Satisfactions, ay, Fleur? You, who must have some understanding of life to be able to write an acceptable book, think your cold embraces could satisfy a love like mine. Don't stand there and smile, damn you! Sit down. I'm not going to force myself on you. What you have told me has finished all that." The big man with the heavy sensual jaw was excited now.

"You can't understand that it has been the lack of responsive love in you that has bedevilled me, can you? No, because you have no real conception of men and men's love, Fleur!" He rose and violently pushed her into her chair. "You

have no conception of love at all. If you had ever loved, Fleur, you would have known that what I have felt for you was not merely passion. You've got a wrong idea of love ; some fool notion you have got out of novels or devised out of your own pretty little head. Why, passion doesn't hold a man, Fleur ! I've trailed you for four years and to-day I am crazier than ever over you. And after what you've just told me, Fleur, I not only love you, I worship you. Love and passion between man and woman are one, girl ; one complements the other. When you love you will know that. I suppose you have got some idea of—Platonism or some such rubbish in your head ; that love is some ethereal thing to be delicately handled with kid gloves, in which anything so low as passion has no part. Passion is not low, Fleur, between men and women who love. It is low when unreciprocated, when gratification of it is bought as I've bought it from you. If you could only understand that it was the degradation of my relation with you that killed me, Fleur ! I loved you too much to let you go, as I thought, to the arms of other men, who wouldn't give you the consideration I gave you. Why did you show yourself to me so vilely ? Why ? Why not have married me ? I would have denied you nothing." He leaned down and dragged her up to him. She was looking perplexed. Her lips were apart.

"I—I can't think, now, somehow, Guy. You

make me forget. I know I did not love you. I wanted my freedom. I was vain to make a name for myself. And you were all sex; all passion. You cared only for my beauty; I never valued it; I was vain of the ability I knew I possessed. You ignored its possible existence. I don't suppose you could hurt a woman more than by ignoring her brains. You were clever in a sharp way, of course, but I wanted something more; I wanted mind, body and soul companionship."—He grunted—"I want that now. I believed I could not help tire of a man who took no interest in woman except as a sex. Perhaps I expected too much. I don't know. Anyhow, it seems I have not known you any more than you have known me."

She drew a deep breath and he encircled her shoulders with an arm, thrust her head back and searched her face.

"Almost, you said, Fleur. Almost I succeeded in waking a response in you. Is that right little girl, ay?"

"Yes, but I don't love you. Guy, let me go."

"That is impossible now, Fleur. You are going to learn to love me. I know I have no great intellect, but I'm willing to cultivate whatever brains I've got for you. I'll read and study and develop whatever there is in me, instead of squashing it as I've done. We'll marry and I'll take you among the real men and women, who do things, like yourself, not among the fancy puppets of my set.

"You don't love me because you've fostered an antagonism towards me. Don't you know, little Fleur who can write a book, that love is more mental than physical? A condition of the mind more than of the senses; whereas passion is of the senses only. It is because of that that my mind became disorganized, Fleur. Passion could never ruin a man of my type. It was despair and hopelessness, the result of my inability to free my thoughts from a woman I despised.

"I'll go away from you now; right away for some time, until we learn to adjust our thoughts of one another. I'll go into the mountains and you can write. Does that go, little Fleur? Will you agree? Why, your dear little face is pale!"

The big man lifted her easily in his arms; and the woman so clever and critical began to cry. Softly at first, then sobbingly. He leaned back in her low chair and pressed her to him without another word.

By and by she calmed and all was still until the little clock began to chime out the hour of eleven. He stirred.

"Time for me to pull out, Fleur."

She sat up abruptly, dabbed at her eyes and hair and rose to her feet. He rose also and stood uncertainly before her. She reached out her dainty neck and sniffed at his coat.

"How good and tobaccoey your clothes always smell, Guy."

He flushed up like a girl.

"Is it good night, Fleur?" Then he seized her and crushed her to him. "That 'almost,' Fleur. It's tormenting me. Is it good night?"

She reached up her arms and drew his head down, intense as himself.

"Darn the clock!" she whispered.

ROY PHIPPS AND HIS WIFE FEODORA

They were a study in antagonisms, Roy Phipps and his wife, Feodora.

Roy was a miner from Australia, come to New Zealand for the bigger money here. He was a tall, fairish man, rather good-looking, with a skin as fair and pure as a babe's and soft, womanish hands that looked out of place on the end of a pick handle. They knew their business, though. His body seemed too slim for his huge legs, which bulged against the rather tight trousers of the day and were slightly bowed.

He was very much in love with his wife.

Feodora had been a barmaid. On her marriage she had been careful to leave her barmaid's license with her mother, in case of future need. This in view of the law which forbade the issue of licenses after a certain date, then past, and the prohibition of barmaids without a license.

She was a fascinating woman. No two opinions about that. Short, but well-moulded; great dark-blue eyes that knew their way about the secret corners of mens' hearts and never scrupled to wander; a mouth ill-shaped but adorable. It continually twitched at the corners, discovering

dimples, two at one side and one at the other, and square, almost transparent teeth. There was an irresistible sweet witchery about the play of those dimples and lips, and this to Feodora was no secret. She practised the use of them regularly before the mirror. Her lips were always apart.

Her voice was her other great asset, being musical in all its gradations. Sometimes she swore most abominably at Roy, and often she told dirty yarns, confidentially ; she sang, in a nicely trained manner, taught by a convent sister ; she laughed, much and often. But her voice never failed of its musical note. Her oaths became pretty and made Roy laugh,—it was a feature of their consortship that if one grew angry the other did not,— her dirty yarns took a tinge of refinement from the tonal quality of her utterance ; her singing was sweet, her laughter a succession of musical shakes.

The two were married in Wellington and after spending all of Roy's money on a honeymoon came to Paranga to " pick up again," as Roy told everybody around him. He had come to Paranga to save money, having been told by miners on the West Coast that Paranga was the only mining town in the country where a man could save money.

And it was his standing grievance, the basis of all his bad temper and nagging, that he could not save money. He blamed it onto his wife.

Feodora was really a capable and practical woman, in spite of her bar-room training. She

took to housekeeping with the verve of a born housewife. She never wasted anything. The tradesmen could not " put anything over her," either, to quote herself. She was too hardened. She slapped the butcher in the face with a lump of topside steak he had tried to palm off on her for rump at rump price. But she could not save anything. Her neighbour, Mrs. King, advised her why one Sunday evening.

" You don't live like working people at all," she pointed out. " Look at all the soft drinks you buy, the great chunks of cake. Pounds of it, every week. You smoke four packets of cigarettes a day between you. Good Lord ! That runs into three shillings a day, twenty-one shillings a week ! And you expect to save ! "

" But that's our living ! " Roy declared, thumping the table. " That's our living ! We've got to live ! "

" Yes, but not like princes," was the answer. " It's all right to live like that if you don't want to save anything. But if you want to save money you've got to scrimp. Cut out the smokes, half of them, anyhow, and the soft drinks."

" I've always lived decently, and I always will. Don't I work eight hours a day for it ? Cut out the drinks, you say. What'll I do when I'm thirsty ? "

" Drink water, like other people." He laughed sneeringly.

"I'm willing to do it if he is," put in Feodora. "I'll smoke one packet a day and drink water if he will. I've told him that before. But he won't. He wants me to give up smoking and drink water, Mrs. King." She lit a cigarette and Roy argued back loudly.

"You've got no right to smoke! I hate a woman to smoke! I don't want you to knock off smoking to save money, but because you're a woman!"

Feodora inhaled deeply, laughed and sent two long clouds streaming out from her nose.

"Yes, that's a good excuse. Of course I'm a woman. What's that got to do with it? Wouldn't be much use to you if I wasn't, would I?"

"I'd get more satisfaction out of you if you weren't! I could punch your damn head then!" He flung out of the little front room of the four-roomed cottage, through the kitchen and into the yard. He had a vegetable garden there which he had been at some pains to bring on. He picked up a hoe and began to hoe savagely between the rows of potatoes.

The two women inside laughed immoderately. Mrs. King was Feodora's chum. She lived next door.

"He's gone to work in his garden now," says Feodora, peeping out the door. "Damn him, anyhow. I won't stick him for long. Fancy living like this for ever."

"You'll have to stick him if you have a baby," said Mrs. King sensibly. "I'm here for life, with my four."

"No babies for me, thank you," was the prompt reply.

"Well—you never know. I say, Roy would have a fit if you did fall in." Mrs. King laughed.

"So would I. But I won't fall in."

"Say you never know, my dear. I've heard that tale before. Each one of mine has been the last, you know."

"Well, Roy takes mighty good care of me. He hates kids worse than poison."

Which was true. Roy's boyhood had been particularly hard; his parents particularly bad parents, and it seemed to have soured him for parentage. He liked his comfort. He would tell his world that whooping cough and measles and wet shirt tails were no good to him.

"And anyhow, how could we keep a kid?" he threw out once to Mrs. King. "Takes every penny I earn to keep the Missis here and me." This with a sullen, grudging glance in his wife's direction.

Their life together was one long antagonism right from the start. Roy was wildly jealous of Feodora. He was jealous of men in her past, of whose existence she had made him aware. Men he had never seen. He had once asked her:

"Am I the first man?" She had replied like a shot:

"No, you —— fool, you're not." And even though his commonsense had told him he was a fool to ask he had flinched as though struck with a whip, then turned sulky and muttered:

"Well, you're not the first woman, either." Feodora laughed.

"And I won't be the last woman, either," she mimicked.

"But I'll be the last man!" he flared out in a sudden jealous rage.

"Oh, well, Roy darling, at least you may think so," she said indulgently. Afterwards she repeated the conversation to Mrs. King, who asked why she pestered him so.

"Because he won't leave me alone. He wants to boss me. He wants me to think as he thinks; to sit and listen and agree with him all the time. Oh, yes he does. That's his sort. He told me one day that I had to drop my independence now I'm married. I'll give him independence." She set her teeth and swore. "First man, indeed! Does he think I was born yesterday?"

On this Sunday evening, after working for half an hour in the garden, Roy came back into the house. The two women were sitting on the front doorstep, gossipping. Mrs. King's children played marbles on the hard white clay in front of the house. When she heard him Feodora said:

"Now he'll start chewing over something. You'll see. I bet he does." And he did.

"Missis," he called. "Did you sew that button on my pants?" He never called his wife by her name; always "Missis." Feodora's eyes went heavenwards and her mouth made a little kissing sound.

"Do you hear that, Mrs. King?" she said loudly. "Didn't I tell you he would start chewing over something as soon as he came in? No, I didn't sew the button on your pants. I've been washing to-day and haven't had a minute." To Mrs. King: "He has plenty of other pants to put on but he must have that pair because the button is off."

"What are you doing now? Nothing, as usual. Why can't you sew it on now?"

"Because I am resting, Darling." Her tone was like treacle. She winked at Mrs. King.

"Resting! The string of oaths that followed was Roy's attempt at saying: "Bah!" Mrs. King called:

"Come and sit down, Mr. Phipps, and for goodness' sake stop nagging. If you were my husband you would sew your button on yourself. What you want is a house full of kids to take the nonsense out of you."

"What I want is a wife that'll look after me," he blustered. "I like my clothes looked after and my house clean." Feodora turned round. He

had lodged himself in the doorway between kitchen and front room.

"Yes, Darling," she said soothingly. "I like your clothes looked after and your house clean too,—so long as you do the looking after and the cleaning."

"You bitch!" he vented.

"And you're another!" she flashed back.

"You're like a couple of kids," put in Mrs. King.

"Kids!" Roy took her up. "Kids! You're always talking about kids, you are. There's going to be no kids in this house, you can be mighty sure."

"What if I want one, Roy dear?" chirps Feodora.

"Then you can go somewhere else and get it."

"Well, that's a fair enough proposition. There's plenty of other men about." She smiled up at him, her armoury of dimples in full play.

"What!" he bellowed. Then he walked over and glared down on her. "You common little bitch! I believe you'd have them, too."

"I surely would, my pet—if I felt inclined." He made to kick her off the step. She flew up and rattled out such a stream of abusive oaths at him that Roy was compelled to laugh. They came from her dainty lips so quaintly. But Mrs. King, who never swore herself, was shocked.

Mr. King strolled across the clay patch to them.

He was a big man, rather ugly but humorously inclined and agreeable. Like most men with whom she came in contact he had more than an eye for Feodora's fascination. She liked him, too, and found it pleasantly convenient to use him as a bait for Phipps' jealousy. This was easy as the two men always worked different shifts. When Roy was day-shift, King was afternoon-shift and vice versa.

King was a very good friend of Phipps' and Roy liked to think he returned the sentiment in kind. He would have really done so if Feodora had not been minded to plague him. He had a scrupulous pride about letting King know of his jealousy, though; he must never be allowed to suspect it. And Feodora knew of this nicety of feeling and played on it till he was maddened.

The two were great company, Feodora and King. He had a never-ending fund of funny stories and a great booming laugh nearly as big as the settlement. And each story he told Feodora capped. She had a bigger collection than he, picked up in her bar-room experience, and all of her yarns were tinged with the pungent spiciness that constitutes the essence of a joke to her kind.

King strolled across and stood looking down on the children playing marbles. His baby, too young to play, started a game around his legs and he stooped and lifted the child to his shoulders. The little face came very near to his own.

"I say, isn't the baby like his father," said Feodora. "Just look at the two of them."

"Well, who else should he be like?" snarled Roy.

"Babies are not all like their fathers, darling," said his wife, making him a mock curtsy.

"Yes, they are. Every baby is like its father. I know all about these babies that are not like their fathers."

"Oh, have a bit of sense!" Mrs. King turned on him wrathfully. "Of course all babies are not like their fathers! You talk like a fool!"

"Oh, do I? Look here! If my wife had a baby and it wasn't like me I'd know it wasn't mine. You damn women can't put anything over on me." Phipps pulled a chair over to the doorway and thumped himself down on it. Mrs. King looked from him to Feodora.

"Well, I never!" she exclaimed. "I'd like to be married to you for a few months. I'd give you it wasn't yours!"

Feodora stood stock still with her hands on her hips, her head thrown back, surveying him through half-closed lids. There was a greenish glint from her eyes. She looked like a sleepy cat. And the expression around her parted, twitching lips was menacing, ominous. King walked over to the doorstep and squatted down with the child still on his shoulders.

"What's the row?" he asked.

"This man here says that if his wife had a baby and it wasn't like him he would know it wasn't his," explained his wife forcibly. King laughed heartily.

"And what would you do in that case, Roy?" he asked jokingly.

"Why, get out, of course," was the truculent reply. King looked at him, rather hard.

"Well, you're a rare 'un," he said.

"It's just as well for you you're not going to have any babies, old girl," said Mrs. King.

"Not going to have any!" King's booming laugh ha-ha-ed its way out over the settlement. "Not going to have any! That's a good one! Who says so?

"I do!" declared Roy. "And what I say goes in this house." He glared a challenge at Feodora.

"Well, well, you never can tell," she chanted mockingly; though in this one particular Feodora was absolutely at one with her husband.

Roy had a great notion, shared by nobody, of his own infallibility. And he could not be persuaded to understand in the least the extravagant peculiarity of his notions.

Their mutual antagonisms spoiled even their love moments. Or perhaps they added a flavour. If he wanted to make love, she did not. If Feodora played around he pretended he did not understand. But she beat him here easily, for she was not particularly passionate and he was. If he annoyed her when he was on day-shift, which was every

other week, she would guilelessly prattle to him of the doings and the sayings of Mr. King and herself in the morning hours. He may have come over and drawn her some water from the well, and told her some particularly funny stories, which she would repeat, and Roy would grin at in a sickly fashion. She would fabricate all sorts of things to annoy him. And he would sit there, sick or glowering, afraid to remonstrate, not daring to air his views on the subject, as he knew very well that Feodora would repeat every word he said to Mrs. King, or even to King himself in front of her husband and so degrade him.

Sometimes she flirted before him, with King or others, flirted outrageously, in the innocent way that only an experienced woman knows how. She would almost fool him with her innocence. He would tremble with jealousy, to which rage would be added if he got the idea she was fooling him.

Once, after one of these spasms, he seized her by force. Ingloriously, savagely, hating himself as he did it. He would have gone on his knees to her afterwards but—. Feodora, all dishevelled with her struggle, sat up, started fixing herself daintily, looked up at him with her dimples all aplay and murmured introspectively :

" I remember a man once——"

He almost struck her then. Almost but not quite. When she told Mrs. King about it the latter took it seriously.

"Oh, you shouldn't," she urged. "That's too cruel. You'll goad him too far one of these days."

"It is his fault. I'll teach him to bully me. I'll show him if he can treat me like a menial. I'll bring him to his knees before I've done with him."

But the time came when Feodora began to look very thoughtful. She grew a trifle absentminded, forgetting once or twice to take up Roy's challenge, astonishing him. He grew more overbearing at once, thinking her cowed. Had he cared to notice, he might have seen a wistful expression on her face now and again, or caught a softening eye bent upon him. A week or two more and she really was cowed. Or at least she was a different woman. Her manner towards him was distinctly humble and he enjoyed his advantage to the full. He crowed over her, ordered her about, then petted and made much of her. He was a happy man.

He lived on the surface of things, did Roy.

Mrs. King was not deluded for a day. She knew at once that there was something fundamental in the change and told Mr. King repeatedly that if Phipps made a fuss or started any of his nonsense she "would brain him, she would."

Feodora had to accept that she had got with child. She told herself and Mrs. King that she was "up against it."

"He will never believe it, Mrs. King," she told her friend. "He will swear it is not his. And I

can't blame him for I can't see how it could have happened myself. How did it happen ? " Her tone was despairing. There was nothing of the cat about her now. She was the slave that was downed by her master and waited the kick. Mrs. King related a hundred " impossible " happenings of the kind.

" I don't think he'll make any fuss at all," she encouraged Feodora. " Good gracious ! The idea is ridiculous ! Have you to be worried to death for his fool notions ? Surely there's a man in him somewhere."

" He won't believe me. I know him. You can't shift an idea out of his head. He'll clear out. I'm sure he will. Then what will I do, like this ? This has finished me."

But Roy had to be told, whether or no, so she decided to get it over quickly. One evening she was her humblest and nicest to him. She had cooked his favourite dinner and he was in a very pleasant mood when he pushed his chair back from the table.

" Get's a cigarette, Missis," he ordered her. She rose and got his cigarettes off the mantelshelf, took one out of the packet and lit it for him. He drew her to him and kissed her roughly. She sat upon his knee.

" Why weren't you always like this ? " he asked. " You might have known that you would have to give in in the end. The man has to be boss ; there's

no getting away from that." She cuddled up to him, kissed him, then said abruptly :

" Roy, I've fallen in."

He must have felt the sudden access of trembling that took her. He must have seen her white face. Perhaps he took her condition as evidence of guilt. Certainly if Feodora had been guilty her condition would have been the same. She felt this herself. In fact, she felt guilty. It seemed as though he was making her guilty.

Anyhow, he pushed her. Brutally shoved her so that she fell in a heap on the floor. She started to cry loudly. He did not look at her ; just left her there and hurried outside.

Feodora scrambled up hurriedly and got into bed, after putting on her prettiest nightgown. As she did so she cried like a child, with floods of tears. She looked like a child, too, very pathetic and engaging. Crying suited her. It did not distort her features. She could have disarmed Roy at any time with her crying and she knew it, but Feodora had scorned such artifice. Hers was the warrior type. She did not scorn it now, however. She kept on crying, now and again glancing at herself in her hand-mirror, expecting him back.

But the long summer evening had been swallowed by the dark before he returned, and her sobs had exhausted themselves. When he came into the bedroom she tried to revive them, but they sounded too much like a snivel so she forbore.

He ignored her. He undressed, got into bed silently and lay with his back to her, but Feodora could feel the very air charged with his hostile, horrific emotions. His silence was portentous. Feodora knew there was no doubt whatever in his mind of her adultery. He could not *know*, as she did. The thing was amazing, almost miraculous, to herself, but she *had* to accept it.

He knew of her past ; she had deliberately played with his trust, especially lately. She knew the tenacious grip of his notions. They were immutable. Nothing could shift them ; not science nor sentiment. Roy was a law unto himself.

This quiet of his presaged woe to Feodora. She felt a thin streak of cold sink down from her throat to the pit of her stomach and gather itself into a lump and lie there. She loved the man.

By and by, when the silence clamoured so loudly that she could not bear its hideous din, she put her arm over him and said, half forlornly, half testily :

" Roy, I know you've got a foolish notion about this. But you'll have to believe me. You'll have to accept it. It's yours. There's been no other man."

" The age of miracles is past," he answered grimly.

The quotation was so unlike him that Feodora was daunted. If he had sworn and cursed at her, or even struck her ! That kind of action she could

deal with. It belonged to their scheme of things. Proper quotations from Roy were redoubtable.

Yet Feodora felt now a glimmer of satisfaction in the situation ; a tiny modicum of compensation in it whatever might betide. Because it came to her that at least they were getting below the surface of things, she and Roy. They were tasting of the richer soil of life. The dark lent her strange fancies that never would have come to her in the light. The wings of Romance brushed her with a promise of fuller knowledge and understanding. This stopped her on the verge of a tragic and impassioned appeal to him. She knew he expected the appeal. She wondered swiftly what the ultimate effect of this circumstance would be on Roy. She could not think he would really leave her though she knew he would never believe. Unless —then it struck her—unless the child came in his image. Then he would have to believe. A flow of light feeling, a glow, succeeded to the weight in the pit of Feodora's stomach.

He moved jerkily, throwing his body away from her arms. She knew he was disappointed at not getting her appeal. He wanted her to crawl. She threw the covers back, sat up straight and sang out loudly :

" Oh, it's all right, Roy ! I'm not going to make a fuss ! This will do you good ! I believe it will do you good ! The child is yours ! That's the end of it so far as I'm concerned ! There's been no

other man!" She sat still for a moment or two then lay down quietly, paying no more attention to him. Soon she grew sleepy.

In the wispy haze of semi-consciousness she formulated half ideas of things she should have said to Roy instead of those words which had told him nothing. She could have told him of the deeper currents of life she found herself fain to sail on; she could have said pretty things in pretty words, about—trust—and love—. How funny that she and Roy had never once told each other that they loved! She could have told Roy that she loved him. It might have softened him. She could have told him of her happiness in her married life, despite the hateful economic stress and his absurd notions. She could have told him of the thoughts that had come to her sometimes about married life. How she had seen a peculiar beauty in the marriage relationship; even in its worst aspects; a beauty in his grumbling and fault-finding; in her own defiance of him; in their very antagonisms, which knit them together.

Then she caught a blurred picture of what would be Roy's reaction to such confidences from her. A surly astonishment, a hostile embarrassment, a drawing in of himself with muttered imprecations on her "damn silliness"; cursing admonishments to "cut out that story-book rot." A tiny, half-born musical trill escaped from her parted lips. She was very sleepy.

"Roy," she murmured. "I believe I'm a bit of a poet."

It was just a faint drawl but he caught it; caught it because his ears were straining for something to appraise him of her condition. He yearned, then, to believe her, though he thought she was crazy and bad. But he could not. On the face of it the thing was impossible. As he lay with the hell of his thoughts, with pictures of King, King and others (he called up a regular art-gallery of portraits) bulking huge in the dark, he hated Feodora like poison for resting beside him peacefully. He thought it was another aspect of her antagonism, of that defiance she had laid down so humbly and suddenly.

She had deceived him there! That hurt Roy badly. It bruised his conceit till the pain of it was worse than the hurt of the other. She had made a fool of him, pretending to give in while laughing at him up her sleeve. And in order to put this over him, her accursed wages of sin.

He started violently. What was that he had said? "Wages of sin." Seemed that Feodora was not the only poet. She must have been thinking things too, to have said that. Not bad at all—"wages of sin." Roy's discovery of his powers of expression then made up for a lot. Towards morning he slept.

He was a wall of impenetrable feeling next day. Feodora arose and got his breakfast. She never

spoke. Neither did he. But he sawed and hacked at his tough breakfast steak like a savage and gulped down his tea noisily. He strode out of the house with a viking's tread. Feodora began to look ill that day, which she spent mostly with Mrs. King. On his return home that night he almost kicked her out of his way when she got in it. He looked half mad. Feodora began to be frightened and nervous again.

All at once he jumped up from the dinner-table, rushed over to the wall and tore down a photograph of one of his wife's old friends. He smashed it on his knee and threw the pieces on the hearth. The glass tinkled on the floor. He cut his hand and blood trickled from the wound, but he did not seem to see it. When he sat down to his meal again the blood ran onto his plate and reddened his food but he went on eating it.

The sight gave Feodora a vertigo. She closed her eyes, went white and sat trembling. A vast compassion beset her. She badly wanted to comfort him but could not. There was no comfort for him for he could not believe the impossible had happened. He ate his own blood. She sickened.

Another night of torture, this time for them both.

Next day was Saturday. Roy got up and ate his breakfast but now he looked dogged, more like his old self. But he did not go to work. Eight o'clock passed and he poked around his garden.

"Aren't you going to work, Roy?" asked Feo-

dora dismally from the back door. "It is past eight o'clock." He shot a triumphant glance at her, nothing more.

But soon he went away from the house. She watched him from the window. He took the road to the general store and Post Office, both housed in the one building. Feodora grew restless with a nameless dread. What had that triumphant look portended? He came running back at about ten o'clock, took off his old coat, threw it on the kitchen table and hurried into the bedroom. She could hear him stropping his razor. She noticed his bank-book in the outside pocket of his coat, not its usual place. He came out and took back a cup of hot water. Feodora crept gingerly to the table and took out his bank-book. She knew they had only a few pounds in the bank.

He had drawn them out. She stood like one petrified. He had drawn them out. It could only mean one thing. He was leaving her—going away. This was the day the weekly mailcart came from Jamestown, the nearest small town and port. Feodora felt as though her world was being cut away from beneath her feet and she was tumbling into the void. He was leaving her! For nothing! The child was his. She had an impulse to scream out, to shout madly that the child was his—was his! To beat her bosom and lament aloud.

But she heard a faint noise behind her. She turned quickly, in time to see the faint shadow of a

man slipping back into the bedroom. He had been spying on her.

That braced Feodora. She got her wits about her. He was trying her out. A sudden instinct told her that if she gave in here, if she raved or broke down or manifested concern he would really leave her. She knew the man and now saw into his mind as though it were the open leaves of a book. His love and his abhorrence were see-sawing. He was undecided. If she made a false step he was gone. Hurriedly she sought the right way. Where was the cord that had drawn him to her and held him? Ah! Feodora's instinct clutched at it. It was the fight in her, the defiance. The force that made her attraction invincible to him was that old desire to subdue her. They were birds of a feather. Mere love would not hold him here. She began to sing; without an effort; for she was buoyed up by her faith in her instincts. She began to sing sweetly, trilling and lilting. Her face grew flushed and her parted lips moist. She made a great clatter with some cooking she was at.

She could almost hear the effect in the bedroom. The silence in that direction was now profound, though before she had caught the faint scrape of the razor. When at last he came out, bustlingly, he was enraged. His face was loaded, sullen, almost bloated with temper. He picked up a towel and went out to wash. Feodora ran to the door, popped

her head round it and with all her old treacly sweetness piped:

"Is it going to clean itself and run away, the pet?" He straightened up and glared at her.

"You—you——" He started the one unforgivable word, but it altered on his lips to: "You ——! You b—— ——!" a common enough appellation around the mines and certainly not considered unpardonable.

When he came out of the bedroom dressed in his best clothes there was a slight hesitancy about his movements, though his rage plainly had not lessened. She went on cooking and singing at the table. He stopped at the kitchen door and flung his face round towards her. She looked intensely fascinating with the flush on her cheeks and dimples aplay. She had taken care to dress becomingly too, the last two days. He waited, turned towards her, for a second, obviously perplexed in the midst of his torment. She looked up casually, stopped singing and asked:

"Why are you waiting, darling? You mustn't worry about me. I'll be all right, believe me." She smiled mischievously.

"All right," he said gruffly and went out. She watched him hurry through the manuka clumps down to the point on the main road where he intended to join the mailcart. And at the last sight of him a weakness overtook Feodora; an awful fear. Her confidence slipped from her. What if

he never came back! She dropped on a chair and shivered. Then all at once a hot flush ran over her from head to foot. She felt spent. She would leave all the mess on the table and lie down. The work did not matter now. She found it difficult to walk into the bedroom, she felt so ill. Soon she started to cry.

But before half an hour had gone by Feodora had good reason completely to recover her strength. Suddenly she sat up, her mouth open, a joyous incredulity lending her features a delightful childishness. In another two minutes she was dancing a haka around a bewildered Mrs. King in that lady's kitchen, whooping and yelling. By and by she sprang upon the table, clapped her hands and swung her feet.

"Oh, just wait till he comes back, Mrs. King! Just wait till he comes back!" she exclaimed.

"Well, he certainly deserves punishment," said Mrs. King. "But what if he doesn't come back? You can't tell."

"Oh yes I can. He'll come back right enough. If you had only seen the way he went!" Feodora could afford to be confident now that it really did not matter if he came back or not. At the worst she could go after him with her news.

But he came back, the next evening. Mrs. King was told and retailed the news to Feodora, that he had got drunk immediately on arriving at Jamestown (ordinarily he was teetotal) and had

blabbed out his troubles to all and sundry in the bar. That was really why Feodora left him. She would have forgiven the other in time. In view of developments it seemed that he was justified in refusing to accept the impossible. She would have forgiven him his suspicions, especially after "she had got her own back," as she expressed it, but his blabbing, never.

He came back in a maudlin condition, weak as water. One of the King children saw him coming up the road and ran in to tell Feodora: "Your husband's coming, Mrs. Phipps."

Feodora rushed to her window. There he was, right enough. Her eyes grew hard as stone as she noted his untidy and dirty clothes; her teeth set with a click. Evidently he had been roughing it. She stood in the kitchen doorway and waited. He came around the corner of the house and saw her. She could smell the alcohol strongly. And, in spite of her bar-room experience, Feodora hated alcohol. She never touched it herself. He stopped and tried to brace himself at sight of her. He made an obvious effort to look fierce and forbidding.

"So there you are," he half bellowed. "Dy'e know what I've come back for? To give you a damn good hiding, that's what! I'll teach you ter whore it on me!" He came forward menacingly but stopped at the gleam in her eye. Then he put up his hands in a fighting posture. Feodora

had no mind to be struck, though. He might try it. So she said at once:

"I made a mistake. I'm not going to have a baby at all." She added a few more words explanatory. Her tone was the nastiest she could manage, though there was still hint of sweetness, but to Roy it was obviously the music of the spheres.

"What!" he gasped. His hands flew out at her, his head jerked forward; his lower jaw fell and his eyes seemed to pop out. "What!"

She stood still and let it sink into him. She could see Mrs. King watching from her back door.

And then Roy fell on his knees before her. Feodora wanted to laugh. Roy—on his knees before her, babbling of his sorrow, his shame, mumbling maudlin pleas for forgiveness. He stared up at her. He clutched at her skirt. His face was all dirty and haggard for want of sleep. He stank of stale beer. Tears came out of his eyes and ran down at the corners.

"Missis!" he beseeched. "I'm sorry! I'll never do it again!" Feodora began to smile, then to laugh.

"Won't you, my pet," she said sweetly. Then, stepping back, she lifted her foot an astonishing height and with all her robust strength sent its wooden heel crashing into his face.

COLUMBINE

COLUMBINE grew up in love with nature. She lived with her parents in a square little house painted green with cream facings. A wide veranda ran round it, up the posts of which banksia climbed in the rose season. There was a flower garden round three sides of the house enclosed by the sweetest rustic fence that can be imagined, for Columbine's father had built it for her mother when love had inspired the dainty designs and passion the framing thereof.

Only old-fashioned flowers grew in the garden, for Columbine's little mother was old-fashioned. She loved a profusion of flowers ; she loved the humble blossoms, the lowly forget-me-nots and mignonette, the rioting red geraniums and fuchsias, but best of all she loved the wild sweet-brier and common roses, with their chaste, pure scents that filled the garden on summer evenings with the wild honey bees out of the bush. She had planted sweet-briers all round the rustic fence.

Columbines grew everywhere, self-planted. They grew on the edges of the bush, peeping out from the lush grasses and nodding with pleasure when the

breezes whisked the seed from under their bonnets and dropped it in the garden. When spring came round each year and columbines grew up everywhere the little mother would pretend a despair she did not feel and pluck them out of her flower-beds with many a "Tut, tut."

But she loved the name of columbine and bestowed it on her little daughter when the latter was six years old. Because the child was like the columbines. She loved the edges of the bush; she laughed with delight when the breezes brought forth a wealth of scents from the garden; she wandered all the time.

At the back of Columbine's home the bush began and climbed back and back and back for unknown miles till it climbed the slopes of the Taraweras. The country was a catchment area and Columbine's father was caretaker of it. In front of the home natural lawns several acres in extent sloped down to the dam, on the other side of which the bush again took up its position. Giant bush of rata, rimu and birch, draped with hanging mosses, inter-laced with miro, supplejack and kia-kie.

The dam lay at the mouth of a little valley and down this valley a creek coursed through open meadowland and bush, gathering up the waters from the valley sides to deliver them to the dam.

Was it any wonder that Columbine grew up in love with nature?

In winter the bush was sombre, almost silent and

at times portentous. It gloomed upon the valley and the little home, mirroring black shadows in the dam, kneading its colossal solemnity into the plastic soul of Columbine. In winter she seldom laughed. Nothing else laughed in nature so why should she? Her eyes grew large and appealing in winter, seeming to be ever listening, ever wondering, sometimes half afraid.

The deer were scarcely seen in winter. They stayed away back in the bush and Columbine longed for the spring when they would return to the grasslands. They came out in the spring in the "velvet," so tame that she could walk among them unheeded and seem to herself that she was one of them. They were her playmates, her companions, the only ones she had. When the tiny fawns set out for their usual evening gallop around and around the lawns, "shying" at the water, leaping over fallen trees, Columbine would set off too and run till she dropped exhausted. And the old stags and hinds would stand with front legs spread apart and watch her mildly.

In the spring the torrential rains would flood the creek and the dam for days together. The usual quiet swish of the overflow would swell to a thunderous roar and to the effect produced on the child's mind by the solemnity and dark majesty of the winter would be added a touch of worship.

But the summer! Yellow light flooding the valley, kissing the waters of the dam till they

shimmered with delight, making hay of the verdant grasses, secreting translucent pools of cool effulgence in the depths of the bush, hazing the valley air to mystery.

Columbine sparkled with the waters. She lay for hours in the hay, among the red deer, growing up as the fawns grew; she sought for the pools in the bush and soaked herself, laughing, in their cool gold; she breathed into her soul the mystery of the hazed distances.

Columbine grew wild. She floated on the bosom of the dam in her little green canoe, still as the summer air, lovely as a lily, entranced with her own condition. The trout rose and flashed in the lambent air. They rose almost at her hand which trailed in the lucid water. Columbine never heeded the fish. Her father had drained the dam once when she was little and left upon its sandy floor a sea of living fish a foot deep. The child had known it for a tragedy because of the little mother's weeping.

She mimicked the calls of the bush folk in summer. She watched for the pigeon's flight across the valley high up and if it flapped heavily she ran for her father to tell that the birds were fat.

But the love notes of the tui! Ah! There was ecstasy! there was felicity! there was music straight from God! Only the sustained raptures of the mocker and the bell-bird excelled those few pure notes of the tui, which purled into the soul of

Columbine with an effect as of wondrous light investing her.

She had a fancy of her own about the tui and his song. The bird would light upon a bough, not heeding Columbine, and for some moments would flirt and bob about in his violently restless way, proud of the sheen and shimmer of his plumage, haughtily exposing his snowy tuft. Then of a sudden he would quiet, open his bill and pour forth the living, liquid stream till his throat swelled as though it would burst with the song. Higher and higher the notes would climb, thinner and thinner the melody, till at last no sound would come to Columbine though she could see the throat still moving and the little head shaking out the notes.

And she fancied that the reason was heaven's envy. The song was too pure for earth and mortal ear so God had wafted it to Paradise to charm the angels' hearts.

She grew like the wild. The swiftness of the deer was in her feet; the abundance of the bush and the gold of the summer sun was in her hair; the snow of the starry clematis lay on her skin. The timidity of the opossum was hers; the grace of the fawn; the rich crimson of the rata bloom played upon her lips. And to look into her eyes was to glimpse the mysteries of life that lurked in valley, bush and stream.

She grew inarticulate as the bush. Outwardly her kinship to nature was expressed in deed alone;

inwardly by unfathomable promptings, and, as she grew older, sufferings for which she had no name. She learned nothing that was real about the bush. She had no will to probe, to fossick, to learn the eternal truths of life from bird or beast or flower. She saw, she marvelled, and the wonder stamped itself upon her form but she never waited to learn nor watched with a philosophic eye. She saw the eggs in the nest and knew that they came from the mother bird but she thought only of their beauty, of the speckled shell or the flush of rose or blue. She shrank from the bellow of the stag in the rutting season and knew to keep out of its way at that time but the portent of that furious blare she did not guess at.

The little mother was old-fashioned.

She grew past girlhood into womanhood. Then strange things took place in Columbine. At times she knew a thirst that all the sweet, sparkling waters of the creek could not allay; she felt a hunger of the spirit that plagued her flesh. The song of the tui and the more seldom raptures of the mocker lost their happy ecstasy and became melting streams of melody built on the keynote of sorrow. Her slumbers were full of dreams.

Columbine wondered. Often she wept and was shy of the old-fashioned mother. In secret she would drape herself in creeping fern, hang garlands round her neck, fasten bunches of red miro in her hair and run through the forest pretending that

there was something in the bush with power to still her yearning and she had only to seek long enough to find.

One day her father said to her: "Keep out of the bush for a while, Columbine. Hunters are up on the hills thinning out the deer. It will be dangerous for you in the bush."

Columbine was startled. Keep out of the bush! Her sanctuary! Giving vague assent she wandered up the creek leaving her household tasks undone. Bend after bend she rounded, walking in the water, which fell into deep holes in places and rippled in musical shallowness over the flat stones and boulders of others.

She crossed a stretch of meadowland, upon which browsed numbers of multi-coloured wild goats that fled into the bush with incredible swiftness at her approach. She followed after them.

And not long afterwards the hunter came upon her. It was in a tiny glade, fenced by giant silver birch and adorned with the lacy-leaved punga. Columbine had thrown herself upon her back, infinitely graceful even in violent motion, had let her arms fall back above her head and rested one leg upon the raised knee of the other. As she lay she caught the full strength of the morning sun. Broad, penetrating shafts of yellow light played upon her, warming her, mellowing her troubled mood to soft sleepiness.

And there the man came upon her. He was

young, big, good to look at, with the sunny, weak face of the sensuous and pleasure loving.

Columbine had never before seen a strange man in the bush, but she did not run away. She just stared at him with the steady, curious fixity of the startled deer.

And he made no difficulty about getting acquainted. She was lovely and dainty and sweet as her name and before long he had told her so; she was timid and shy and slow of words, her condition a well of mysterious delights which he sought after one by one. He went with her to her home and made himself known to her mother. He sought out her father that very first night and asked for permission to woo her. He neglected the deer unless she went with him and, indeed, knew no peace without Columbine. He loved her.

He told her she was unique. He lay at her feet in those translucent pools of gold within the forest and told her of love; of its manifold graces and secret delights. Told her carefully, because of her timidity and innocence; told her subtly, with pretty turn of phrase and glowing eye to rouse the sleeping woman which tantalizingly lay low. In turn her utter ignorance of life appalled and bewitched him. It had its charm, but to his healthy mind also a trace of the sinister. Sometimes he cursed the old-fashioned mother, who smiled pleasantly upon his courtship and fondly hoped for Columbine.

His name was Renal.

And she ? She ceased to drape herself with garlands and run through the forest seeking. The mystery in the depths of her dark eyes came closer to the surface as though to spill out upon life. She took on a womanly manner at times which was out of keeping with her wild appearance ; but when her mother tucked up the abundant hair she took out the pins because Renal had said that the golden mass lay upon her back like the trailing pukatea flower.

Where before she had looked for the pigeon's flight she looked now for the coming of the man ; where before she had suffered with the sorrow in the song of the tui she heard now honeyed messages of love from her lover.

Love ! Columbine trembled when he sat at her feet and told her the meaning of love. She trembled and veiled her liquid eyes but she never bent towards him nor suffered a caress, even from his hand.

She knitted him into her bush. With him at her side her life was complete ; her yearning was stilled ; her slumbers again became restful and quiet. She was satisfied. The demands that her womanhood made on the male were met by the man's mere presence.

He was careful and patient and wise—in his way. He talked to her of the cities and of all the wondrous contrivances of the civilization she knew nothing

of, but failed to strike a spark of response. She would knit her brow and shrink away till he returned again to the wild.

In time he became impatient. "But it is the cities you need, Columbine," he cried. "You are only the shreds of a woman! You seek me and run to me and I can see the love in your eyes, yet you will not accept a caress. It is the cities and their life, the life of ordinary men and women, that you need to develop you and bring you to me. Oh, Columbine, come to the city with me and soon you will come to my arms."

He kissed her. Thinking to wake her, full of his love, he kissed her forcibly, holding her close.

She fell from him, struck at him, then flew from him into the bush like a stricken hind. She wanted no kisses! Oh, no! Oh, no! It hurt her somewhere; it made the world grey; it took the shine out of the sunlight.

There was nothing in Columbine that answered to his kiss. Her need was his presence alone, the throat of the tui, the song of the mocker, the habits of the possums that climbed in the trees. She avoided him.

He loved her. He suffered and waited, fearful she would not return.

But her wild without the man was now only a half-solace; its music was slightly discordant; its shadows seemed bare of protection. His sunny face came down to her on the broad shafts of gold

that found her at rest in the bush. It peeped from beneath the citrine of the leaves and Columbine would welcome it and smile till the sunniness was marred by a flood of desire. She did not know what it was, that desire, but its violence alarmed her. It made the man ugly in her sight and polluted the idea of marriage for with the desire came always his entreaties for marriage. Marriage, to Columbine, was something that belonged in his cities, something that had no place in the quiet of her bush.

When she returned to him she tried to express, in her inarticulate way, that it was only his passion she could not bear. His passionate mood hurt her like the harsh screech of the kaka and made her fear him. She asked him to stay in the bush for ever, living out their idyll just as it was.

He hurt her again with his scornful laughter. His love became crazed with impatience so that he was often ill-controlled. He told her he had to get back to the city; to his work by which he earned his daily bread and Columbine's eyes filled with dismay. She drooped like the clematis plucked from its bed.

He became brutal. He told her of the mating of the wild things, bringing the blush of shame (an emotion she could not name) to her cheeks. He called her to witness the young of the bush at play and worked to wake the mother that surely must lie dormant within her. He talked to her of her parents, intimately.

And the effect was to drive Columbine from him.

He saw it. He writhed in his soul and cursed her for her lack. He had never been foiled before and was weak and sensuous beside; his shallowness harboured little reserve strength for a crisis like this.

He upbraided the mother for her "neglect" of Columbine; troubling the woman who was dumb in face of the big universals of life. What could she say to Columbine? Nature did those things he asked of her, not mothers. So said her poor philosophy of life.

She murmured in distress that Columbine was young.

He said: "That's rot. She is twenty-one. Almost as old as I am."

Harassed, she essayed a little advice. "Leave her for a while. Go away and then come back. She will miss you and perhaps alter."

He said that he could not return for a year and fumed at the delay. Undoubtedly he was a little mad and the mother worried now over Columbine.

Again Renal implored the girl to marry him and go to the city. "You will have to choose between your bush and me, Columbine. And you will have to choose at once. I've got to get back to my work. I want you. I love you and you love me. You have lived all your life in this rotten old bush. You are wild and not able to judge for yourself.

You are driving me mad! You won't let me touch you! Let me make love to you, Columbine! Let me touch you and kiss you and warm your body in my arms! Show me you love me, Columbine! Give me some proof of your love!"

They were reclining in the hay on the bank of the dam. She lay on her stomach, her elbows planted firmly before her, her chin resting in the cup of her hands; he on his side close to her, his face thrust towards hers, impetuously pleading.

She gave him a slow glance of doubt and trouble, then said plainly: "I prove that I love you by staying with you all the time. I want to be with you all the time so long as you leave me alone. When you kissed me before it made me miserable. I didn't want you."

He flung himself back from her. "Yes, I know! You've said that before! It means that you do not love me! That's all! You do not love me at all! I shall go away now!" He leaped to his feet swiftly, but Columbine was swifter.

"Oh, no, Renal! Don't go away."

"Why not, ay? Why not? What are you to a man? Why, you are stupid! When a man loves a woman he wants her in his arms. You are playing with me! Trying to hurt me——" He became violently abusive.

Columbine thought of the time she had heard her father abuse her mother and trembled and wilted before him as her mother had done before

the other. It was evidently the way of men.

He stopped in a burst of tears; tears of shame and longing and despair.

And to Columbine there came proof of her womanhood anyhow, for his tears brought to her the thought of sacrifice. "Oh, Renal," she whispered, close to him. "Oh, Renal! I hate your love, but I'm willing to try and like it. I'll try and love you as you like. To-night—here."

He almost knelt before her. His sunniness came back; his tears were washed away in floods of eager happiness. "Little sweetest Columbine! Wild flower of the woods!" His extravagance of phrase made up for much to Columbine.

Of his own volition he left her till the night. He took his gun and went away back on the hills, hunting for deer but holding his hand when he found them. He could not kill. He thought of Columbine as she was not; as a woman of the world he knew; investing her with that woman's qualities of mind which were altogether lacking in Columbine. He painted a picture built on his hopes. She would come to his arms in shy but willing surrender; she would give her lips to his ardent pressure and make no more ado about marriage.

He dreamed of their future together. A solid, practical future befitting a man of his type; no idealistic nonsense, no happiness in the clouds, no "wild" to plague with its mystical glooms and

entrance with its dancing leaves. The practical life of the city for him and Columbine—. Well, a man's wife was his wife and she would have to learn to conform.

For the girl those intervening hours held little of comfort but a great deal of pain. She was too simple to envisage clearly what might or what might not, be. Her mind was free of the devious ways of her more civilized sisters and did not know how to play around or to focus upon a subject. To her, she had undertaken something. It had to be done and in the doing she would know whether she would love Renal in his man's way which seemed to him so paramount and go to the city with him, or whether she would elect to stay in the bush. She was puzzled and restless and fearful; hungry for help from her mother but repressed by the habits of years.

She stayed indoors though the sun shone brightly, and tried to think deeply on the matter; tried to think about other women. But she could not. She had developed no habit of thought, so each phase of the subject eluded her. For the first time in her life she felt inadequate, unformed, "stupid," as Renal had said. She could only suffer dumbly, unable to hold communion even with herself. Her eyes followed her mother about, eloquently telling a tale of distress, but the little woman, though seeing dimly, found nothing in her experience to meet the case. Columbine was in

trouble but what to do or what to say the mother could not think.

So night came down on the valley.

Columbine watched it creeping down, watched the shadows deepen to gloom, then to black, quickly, as night comes down in the bush. She sat on the edge of the veranda, leaning against a creeper encircling a post and let herself become part of the night.

The soft blanket of darkness brought her peace. Gradually the pain and fear of what was to come escaped from her to be replaced by the tranquillity of her natural surroundings. She forgot Renal. And by and by the moon rose above the tops of the trees to shed a gentle, misty luminance upon the water of the dam. All was so serene. Vague shadows upon the sward bespoke the presence of deer and now and again a deep gusty breath from one of them gave friendly comfort to Columbine. She felt at home.

Therefore, when of a sudden the calm of the sub-tropical autumn night was broken by the distant bellow of an angry stag and she was roused to remembrance of Renal waiting, she rose and left the garden with no qualm at her heart of what was toward. She could not love the man in his way. Not yet. She would not. She would tell him to come back next year. She even smiled at the thought that he might not come back at all.

It was the wrong time for man's love-making

with Columbine, the twilight and first hours of the night, for it was the time of her deepest submergence in nature, the time she was closest to God. The day was of earth; the night was of heaven. The velvety dark hid the thorns in life's path; it drew out of her womanhood her need. She walked slowly across the lawn to the man, hugging to herself the thought of her purity.

He waited in patience, knowing that she would come at her own time. He felt chivalrous and manly and good, to his way of it, thinking what he would do for Columbine. Why, he would lay his life at her feet.

He met her with tenderness, with gentle and humble murmurs. The darkness blurred her face. He made no attempt to touch her at first, waiting for her to offer.

But now he was only a male to the girl, who had ceased to be flesh and blood. She could not see his sunniness, and the spirit that flowed out of him was the expression of just that in him that repelled her most, the spirit of desire and passion. She felt the trembling of his body in the huskiness of his voice. But it did not worry her nor move her to pity. She was placid. Not knowing what else to do she sat down at his invitation. She drew up her knees and rested her chin upon them and very soon would have again fallen into reverie had the man not become impatient and urgently whispered: "Columbine!"

"Yes?" she murmured. "Yes?"

He moved a little nearer. "Sweetheart, the night has come. What did you promise when night had come?"

She turned to him almost nonchalantly; her attitude alone was a blow.

"I can't love you, Renal, in your way. You mean nothing at all to me to-night."

His daydreams of their future together were scattered like pigeons in flight. He grew cold in the warm autumn night. He sat as still as the water at their feet, his adult reason striving to master the child that had never before been denied. He dared not move for fear of releasing some of his strength. He wanted to give the woman her due. She had the right to refuse. It ran round and round in his brain.—She had the right to refuse.

But other life was busy in the valley and betrayed him. Other males were seeking their mates. Down from the hills came the stag, his furious bellow challenging creation.

Columbine lifted her face and smiled. It was part of her home, that raging blare; she did not fear the stag in the dark. It gave her a sense of comfort, or added security in the thing she was doing. She wanted to leave the man, to leave him without a word, but courtesy forbade her running away. Why had he not spoken? She thought it strange he was so still and silent. She would say good-bye and go.

Then again there came that furious bellow, quite close this time, crying the approach of a male that gave no quarter.

It had a magic effect on the man that was awful. The primitive came to life. The bush, the dark valley, the unfettered life of the wild around him disenthralled, unchained him. His passion surged through him in response to that call. Life!—He was asking for, needing, demanding! The woman? Why, woman was only the means to an end! To hell with the morals and customs and habits of civilized people! He laughed with the influx of freedom. He shook his big body and reached for her with predatory fingers.

"'Male and female created he them,' Columbine!" he cried, exultingly. "You want your wild, little girl, ay? I'll give you the law of your wild!"

The night hung around to veil the tragedy; the water still peacefully rested; the bush betrayed Columbine in making no murmur. She did not cry out because she could not bear that her parents, who were strangers to her, should know of the thing.

The beast in the man was soon quietened and he became mad in a different way. She wanted to leave him but he held her to listen to his pleading, his excuses, his crazy self-accusations. When she dragged herself at last from his hands and fled, he almost crawled after her on his hands

and knees, still beseeching, threatening self-destruction if she did not return to him, babbling that for a man of his kind there was nothing now to live for.

He lay on the trampled warm hay all night, as close as he could get to her window. But he gave little thought to Columbine's condition. He was swallowed up in the cloud of his own shame, tortured, and chiefly because in the back of his mind there lay a rainbow that persistently shone through the storm of his tears, a rainbow the colours of which were the seven little words: "she will have to marry me now."

He could afford the tears, the shame and the remorse because she would have to marry him now.

Columbine got into bed and almost at once fell asleep. She knew no physical suffering once she had escaped from his touch and very little spiritual woe. Her body shook with the shock and the force of the struggle she had made and demanded rest. She felt she must have rest, that was all. She had very little sense of outrage. She had done with him; this had finished it; she did not have strength left to hate. She slept deeply.

But when dawn was rousing the wild life of the valley she was awakened by three tolling bell notes. Pure, loud and close. She sat up swiftly and listened, her eyes wide, her red lips apart. They came again, the three clanging notes, then again in a different direction, then again in a far

distant tolling. The bell-birds! The autumn had brought them again to the valley and soon the morn was alive with their song. Before Columbine could dress their dawn chorus had started. A choir of innumerable songsters, unparalleled on earth for their song. She hurried, she flew to get out to the woods. She knew their haunts and their friendliness and wanted to see them as well as hear. She thought how jealous the tuis would be when they heard their rivals back again. She never thought once of the preceding night till she went to climb out of the window and saw Renal asleep in the grass. His face was hidden in the crook of his arm.

Then it came to Columbine all of a sudden that she would have to marry that man. He had told her various things. He had told her that children were born when men and women mated and she had accepted the knowledge in its fullest literal sense, asking no questions, ashamed. Well, she would have to marry him, marry him, marry him. The three tolling notes came out of the tangle of silvery sound and took up the strain. She shuddered. Marry him! Now that she hated him, and go to the city, away from the bush and the bell-birds, away from all that was home. She turned from the window and went out of the door, running to put distance between her and Renal. She wept as she ran, forgetting to look for the bell-birds' haunts but loving their choir all the same.

The tinkle that ran like a silver thread through the more robust melody seemed an accompaniment to her tears.

She travelled for miles in the wonderful dawn and the rising sun found her on the bank of the creek, above a deep hole. It was a spot she often came to in the hot months of the year because of its singular beauty, its luxuriant growth. Across the creek ratas from fifty to a hundred feet towered in sombre majesty, brooding, just then, over the loss of their bloom. The undergrowth had been mostly eaten out by the deer, but nikau and punga made up for its loss. Festoons of red miro berries gaudily bedecking the larger trees, tempted the pigeons. There was no approach to the creek at that spot as the banks on both sides were high and steep and from top to water's edge they were smothered with everlasting daisies and blue-bells.

Columbine sat down on the daisies and looked around at the morning. Red from the new sun hazed the air, painted the tops of the trees, smeared the deep water of the pool beneath her. And the lavish scents of the bush were as poignant as her sorrow.

But in time her grief was assuaged with the soft peace of the forest and water and the comfort of the flowers. She forgot. The red of the sunrise departed and was replaced by the white light of the day. Columbine's tears dried up in the sun and into her spirit there flowed a stream of gentle

ecstasy induced by her kinship with nature. It was vibrant, subtle, sweeter than she had ever known before. A deeper note of her being was struck, a lower register in her soul which had been uncovered for experience to play on. The stream ran stronger till she fancied she heard the sap running in the trees. Some deer came noiselessly into the bush on the other side of the creek and lay down as though they were drowsy. They looked at Columbine mildly.

Her soul was full of ecstasy, her body was replete with content, like the deer, when suddenly there smashed into her quiet a cry that cut off her heaven. It was Renal, shouting her name. Fear and grief were expressed in the cry, but Columbine only heard its cruel echo in her soul, which told of a dreadful destiny. It was reality ravaging her dreams. It meant marriage, the city, the loss of all she loved and coming on her at that moment left her thoughts scattered and silly.

The deer were up and gone on the moment.

Columbine did not know what to do. She could not bear him to find her and yet she knew that he would. She did not now feel that she hated the man. She did not give him thought. It was what he stood for, what he meant to her future—the loss of the bush.

It never could be! The bush was her life. It came to her in a trice that she never would leave the bush. Something would stop it. But what?

She looked around her slowly, sure that something was there to stop it and she had only to seek to find.

He came closer, crying her name and Columbine had looked in the trees, at the sky, to the pool. The pool! Ah! It was there! She smiled and drew a long breath. There were trout in the depths of its coolness, she knew, though they were too far down for her to see. She leaned over and gazed down intently. Far below the surface she could see the trailing waterweed. It moved its tendrils, seeming to beckon her. She cast off her maturity and became again a little child. Her body was so hot and the water looked so cool. She could slip gently down the bank among the daisies and the blue-bells, kissing them as she passed.

She put up her hands and spread out her hair, thinking how pretty it would look floating in the water. Renal would see it there. Her last thought as she let herself over the top of the bank was that Renal had said her eyes were like the pools in the creek.

He leaped in beside her, calling her name, and before her distress overcame her Columbine knew he was there. Columbine was glad he was there.

But Renal could not swim.

HER BIG IDEA

It was pay night at one of the mines on the West Coast of New Zealand and the "day-shift" were knocking off work. They streamed out of the mine-mouths in their hundreds, like black souls emerging from hell, with their small pit lamps still hanging, alight, to their caps. They rushed the pay office. With their pay envelopes in their pockets they made off in different directions. Some scattered to the various homes that dotted the hillside thickly; some made for the pub and the two-up school, not waiting even to bathe, and others hurried to clean themselves and rush down the half-mile of hillside to catch the train to Westport for a "weekender" in town.

Jocelyn made for the pub. He intended to have just one drink to wash the coaldust out of his throat and then go home, for he had promised his wife to bring the pay home this night instead of trying to double it in the two-up school. He stepped along with some "homies," Lancashire miners just out from Home. They were fulminating against the method of working the coal out here and Jocelyn's New Zealand blood flared up to "take it out" of the hated "homies."

"The hell of a lot you know about mining, the lot of you," he taunted. "You talk about working coal! Why, you can't even square up a face. You hew like a lot of —— kids. I'll back one pig island miner against three of the best that ever came out of England and back him to win. Honest to God, now, is there one among you that knows anything about scientific hewing?"

A chorus of Lancashire dialect rose against him, pointing out the difference in shaft mining, to which they had been accustomed, and the drive-in system of the Coast mines. The row continued till they reached the nearest public house and entered it. Jocelyn was too engrossed to notice his wife standing at the door of their home a hundred yards below the hotel.

He had his drink with the "Lancs;" they had one with him. The bar was full and before half an hour had elapsed there had been a free fight between New Zealanders and Englishmen to settle the question of which were the best miners. The dialects of Durham and Lancashire and Scotland made a hideous babel when capped with the inimitable oaths that punctuated the New Zealanders' good English.

Jocelyn was not a drinker. His couple of drinks were enough, but he joined in the fight till he got a crack from a Scotsman that nearly put him out, when he lost interest in the subject and looked around for someone to bet with. He had forgotten

his promise to his wife in the row and excitement.

Mrs. Jocelyn had seen him enter the pub. She had not much faith in his promise, but hope is a quality that dies hard in a woman; and this night she hoped more poignantly than usual. For she did not feel very well. She did not want to go to the dance that night—but if Jocelyn did not come home with the pay——

She waited at the door of the three-roomed shanty for a quarter of an hour and then hope died out suddenly and flatly. She might have known, anyhow, after all these years. How she cursed the pubs! With their booze and their harbours of two-up. She remained at the door shading her eyes from the hot sunlight with a toil-worn hand, taking in afresh the hatefulness of the scene before her and her part in it. The camp on the hillside, mostly tin shanties sticking out from the steep rocky incline to rest their fronts on tall piles; beneath and all around the shanties piles of tins,—fruit tins, jam tins, condensed milk tins, fish and meat tins, the whole bearing eloquent testimony to the quality of the miner's diet. And everywhere the yellowish grey rock. No soil. Above the camp, above the mine-mouths, the hill-top covered with niggerheads and wiregrass.

Here and there at a back door women gossiped. Slatternly women mostly, who would presently rush home to throw a lump of tough steak into a frying pan for husband's and kiddies' tea. But

Mrs. Jocelyn had no thought of condemnation for those women though herself was clean and tidy and her tea was decently cooked. For she knew the why and the wherefore; she knew how some of those women had started. Her eyes closed and her hand clenched at her side in a paroxysm of hatred for the pubs and the two-up and the conditions of the miner's life which drove him to them. Her head ached.

Numbers of men passed her on their way down the hill and gave her a cheery word. She was a comely woman, well liked. The "weekenders" passed her on the run, well-dressed and smart after the manner of the native New Zealand coal miner. She smiled drearily at those she knew.

Shortly she went indoors, followed by the stench from the creek. There was no sewerage system in the township; every kind of filth had to be tipped into the creek to be carried away by the frequent floods, but if there happened to be a dry spell, as at this time, the refuse piled up and rotted in the sun till the stinks of it lay like a loathsome blanket upon the township. Mrs. Jocelyn shuddered with sickness at it.

The children poured in, four of them; they had been playing in the creek bed. Their mother got their tea, interposing as usual in their numerous quarrels.

"Where's Dad?" the eldest boy, aged twelve, asked her by and by.

"He is not home yet," she answered. "But never mind him. You get your tea."

"Yes, I know," he grumbled precociously. "He's gambling and you won't have any money again this week. And I want a new suit, I do. This one's all to pieces. The kids laughed at me to-day over it."

The mother caught her breath; her hand went to her heart. "Laughed at you, did they?" she said slowly. Then she flew to him, clutched him to her and rocked herself with his face pressed against hers. "They won't laugh at you again over it, Darling. Mother will get you a new suit to-morrow. I'll get you a suit to-morrow. I promise."

He pulled himself away from her shamefacedly with an: "Aw, all right."

The other children gaped at her. She did not usually caress the older ones.

After tea she took some aspros to cure her headache for the dance. About dusk, after putting the little ones to bed and calling the others indoors, she put on her one "best" frock, curled her bustered hair with hot tongs and did her face up as well as she could with the cheap powder and lipstick she had. She liked the effect.

She arrived at the dance hall about nine o'clock and stood looking in at the doorway, more particularly scrutinizing the men. It was the usual dance for the mining township; for music, a piano, played very well by a miner; the feminine element

mostly married women, and a huge preponderance of men. Mrs. Jocelyn walked in and sat down on the hard board seats that ran all around the hall.

The women never wanted for partners among so many men, but she had the extra advantage of being a very good dancer. She thought pleasantly how fortunate it was that the best looking men were also the best dancers. She did not want to dance much this night, however. Her head still bothered her and the night air streaming in through the open door and windows was fetid. She meant to effect her purpose and then get home to bed.

She did not like her first partner. The second she did. He was big (she hated little men) and dark and good-looking ; a decent sort, too, she knew by experience. A round or two of the waltz and she pressed his arm.

He responded instantly. His arm drew her close and his eyes dropped to her face. He held her tightly till the dance ended and then sat down beside her. He was much younger than she was. He took out his handkerchief and fanned himself and her alternately. As he did so he said : " You look tired to-night. Aren't you fit ? "

She said woodenly : " No. I'm tired and my head aches."

" Ay ? Is that so ? Have an aspro." He fumbled in his pocket.

" No, thanks. I took some after tea and they helped a lot but I won't have any more."

A minute of silence while the M.C. announced that someone would sing and then she added: "Fred didn't come home again to-night."

A careful expression came over his features. He crossed his legs and put his handkerchief back in his pocket; then leaned forward and fiddled with his shoelace. Mrs. Jocelyn noticed that he wore cream silk socks. She watched him out of the corner of her eye. She wanted it to be him, again, somehow. He was so clean—and decent. The song began and nothing more was said till it finished and the music struck up a foxtrot.

"Come on," he said. "We'll have this, ay?"

She rose and gave herself to his arms. She wondered for a moment if she had put too many clothes on the baby in the heat. She felt inexpressibly tired; hankered after her bed. The young man shortly squeezed her to him and whispered: "Are you hard up again?"

"Yes," she answered in the same wooden manner.

"I made a pretty good cheque off the pillars this pay."

She pressed his hand and said nothing.

"Say we go?" he asked after another round or two.

"Not yet." Her lip curled and the hideousness of the game she was playing made her incautious, for once. "I can't go yet. I'll have to pick up another man for to-morrow."

He almost thrust her from him in disgust; almost stopped dancing. Then resumed and spoke coldly. "You're making it pretty hot, aren't you?"

She clenched her teeth and whispered: "My boy wants a new suit and I've promised him it to-morrow."

His brow contracted. He cursed Jocelyn under his breath, then said: "Well, I told you I'd made a good cheque. You can have it all. Come on."

"No. I can't take all that money from you. You're too good. I've had enough out of you as it is—to keep his children." The last was sheer bitterness.

He looked down on her straightly. "And what have I had out of you? You don't think enough of yourself. Of course a fellow has to live, but you can have all the rest, if you cut the others out."

They left the hall, the woman going first for decency's sake. A mere formality this, as everybody knew and nobody cared for everybody did it.

He met her at an appointed spot and they walked down the hill towards his hut in the darkness, keeping to the shadows as much as possible. Mrs. Jocelyn said again: "No. You're too good. I can't take your money like that. It is not—not decent."

"Good God, Woman!" He jerked her arm. "Is there anything decent about anything in this rotten hole? Think of the whole business. How

many married women and single men are doing this to-night while the husbands are drunk or gambling ? Look here ! " He stopped, and, thrusting a hand into his hip pocket, drew out his pay envelope. He took her hand and closed it over the paper. " There ! You can take that and go home now, if you like. I'm pretty rotten but I'll do a good action for once. Get ! "

She smiled in the darkness and pushed the envelope back to him. " No, no ! Nothing for nothing. I give or I won't take. I don't mind giving to you so much, now, anyhow. I would sooner have you than Fred. But I hate the whole thing ! " She finished with a tired little burst.

The man stood still, thinking. He gave a queer little laugh, then dragged at her waist. " Come on, then. Do you know what ? If you didn't have the kids I would keep you, I would. I could fall in love with you if you had no kids."

She did not reply ; just hurried along with him to the hut.

When she arrived home an hour later Jocelyn was asleep in bed. She looked at him with hate in her heart, then sat on the side of the bed and noisily kicked off her shoes. Strange thoughts and emotions were at work within her tired body. She had a mind to wake him and tell him about the other—the others, but a glance at her sleeping baby tied her tongue. She felt the pay envelope in her pocket bulging with the whole of the other man's

pay. The other man's pay! Where was Jocelyn's? She picked his trousers off the floor and felt in the pockets, thinking to find them empty, as usual.

But not this time. He had had a run of luck, the first for months, and altogether she counted out over fourteen pounds in notes and silver. He had doubled his pay.

She dropped the lot upon the floor and clenched her hands. She looked old in the flickering candle-light. She need not have done it this time! She need not have suffered that horrible mauling! —though of course the young man had been nice in his way. The boy could have had his suit without her martyrdom. Wave upon wave of hate for the man in the bed surged over her; she wanted to groan but repressed the desire in plebeian shrinking from emotional luxury. She dropped sprawling over the foot of the bed.

The movement woke the man. She heard him rouse himself and look around for her, then saw him sit up.

"Hallo, old girl," he cried eagerly. "What are you lying there for? Come on in to bed. I had a win to-night. Fourteen pounds. A jolly good thing I forgot I promised you——" He broke off awkwardly, laughing.

Mrs. Jocelyn sat up too. Her face was white with the fatigue of what she had done and dark blotches lay beneath her eyes. But there was now a funny little smile around her pinched lips and a

cynical gleam in her eye. For she had just thought of something. Something he would not like. She wondered that she had not thought of it before. It seemed to her to be a really big idea.

"I got the money out of your pockets," she said and stooped to pick it up from the floor.

He turned sulky. "Well, you needn't have been so slick about it. I would have given it to you right enough. You knew that."

"That's so." She put the money in a drawer and proceeded to undress. "I am going to buy Harry a new suit to-morrow."

He did not answer, being still sulky, so presently she proceeded: "I keep the children fairly well clothed and fed, don't I, Fred, considering?"

He looked up at her then, shamefaced. "Yes, I know you're a great manager," he mumbled.

She turned and looked him straight in the eyes. "Do you never wonder how I manage to do it, Fred?"

He fell back on the pillow and turned his face from her. "I know I'm a skunk. I know we must be head over heels in debt. There's not many women could manage like you; and I know there are not many women as straight as you in the place, too, Margie. I hear the men talking about the other women."

She paused in the operation of taking her hair down, then went on deliberately: "And you never hear the men talking about me, Fred. They

would be hardly likely to talk of me in your hearing, would they ? "

" What do you mean ? " He lifted himself on his elbow.

" Nothing, really. I was just stating a fact." She climbed into bed beside him and waited, knowing Fred, thinking of the something she had thought of.

It was that actually this man was no more to her than the others, a revolutionary idea for her, and that she could get a little of her own back by putting him in his place. She imposed a certain code of honour on herself in regard to the other men. She took nothing for nothing and yet all along she had been giving this particular man something for nothing. Something he valued, too, she knew, for he was passionately inclined. She bit her lip in rage to think what a fool she had been. Her husband ! Oh, that loathsome word ! It had fooled her, betrayed her, reduced her to infamy. And him, too. In his subconsciousness, as it had been till now in hers, the word " husband " balanced a multitude of sins. Well, this night the chain that lurked in every letter of that word had snapped ; her puny soul had revolted. She almost ground her teeth to think how that word had enslaved her. It had been weighted with a million significances and now of a sudden it was empty. He was just a man, like the others, and, like the others, he would pay. He would pay or go hungry for her. She

relished the thought of making him writhe by stripping his veneer of "husband."

So when he made his advances she grinned maliciously at him and said: "All right. My body is yours to-night because you've paid for it as other men pay for their women."

He jerked himself away from her and said hecklingly: "That's a damn funny thing for a woman to say to her husband."

"It is not a funny thing at all, Fred. The funny thing is that I haven't said it before. Several women here have told me that the single men pay handsomely for their pleasures. Don't you think——?"

He interrupted her angrily. "What the hell are you talking about? What's that got to do with us? You're my wife, you are. I'm your husband. Why do you associate with that kind of woman, anyhow? I don't like you getting round and—and talking that sort of talk with that kind of woman, and that's flat."

A red flame shot into the woman's brain. She doubled her fist and struck him on the mouth with the full weight of her body behind the blow.

He was astounded. His eyes nearly shot out of his head. It hurt him badly too, for his head was still sore from the Scotsman's fist. He sprang out of bed and stood glaring at her, grotesque in his shirt, spluttering. "What in hell, ay? What in hell——?" and so on and so on till Mrs. Jocelyn

started to giggle hysterically. Then he sat down on the side of the bed.

She restrained herself with a jerk and spoke with an air of tired finality. "It's like this, Fred. I'm sick of this life. If you want me you've got to pay for me. You bring me home your pay and you get me; you don't bring me your pay and you don't get me. Understand?"

He flung round on the bed. "No, I'm damned if I do! I'm your husband, Woman! You don't know what you're saying! You're mad! me pay for you! Why, damnation take it, if I want to pay for a woman I can get any of the—"

"Don't say it!" she screamed at him and woke the baby. She sprang up onto her knees. "You say one word against those women, those good women who keep their children with the sale of their bodies to good men and I'll—I'll kill you, I will. I'll scratch your eyes out!"

He stood up slowly and looked down on her through narrowed lids. She felt a strange sinking at her heart for he seemed more of a man, somehow; he seemed to be leaving her and a tiny gleam of suspicious fire shot from between those lids. Her idea did not seem so wonderful just then. "Good women, ay; Good women! You seem to have a hell of a lot of sympathy for those good women tonight; the women who keep their kids with the sale of their bodies to good men. Say, Kid, you ought to hear some of those good men talk about

those same good women in the pits. It would be sure edifying for you."

She fell back on her pillow without a word and lay with closed eyes. He remained standing, watching her peculiarly. By and by she did groan. It was forced out of her. She felt as though an iron band which was Life was slowly crushing her to death. She had to open her eyes to get rid of the illusion.

The groan made him jump. Then he sat down again carefully, thoughtfully, with his back to her this time. She wept a little, quietly, so that he did not know, and in spite of herself grew drowsy. She began to fall into sleep, still thinking determinedly that she would make him pay, when he got into bed, placing himself with his back to her. But she was not deceived. She knew him. She knew he would claim his own before long.

She remembered her resolve almost before she was awake in the morning. She could hear him moving about in the kitchen, carefully, so as not to wake the children. He always put himself out to work. She felt dull and listless.—And relentless, though last night's events had dwindled in importance. Why had she wept? She felt hard enough now. There was nothing to weep over; she had learned sense, that was all; rather something to rejoice about. She wondered if he would bring in her cup of tea, as was his custom.

He did bring it. And brought it with his usual air, as though nothing had happened.

"Awake?" he queried casually. "Might as well stay in bed for a while. I suppose you're tired after the dance. There's nothing to get up for, anyhow."

She did not reply. Just took the cup and stirred the sugar around in it, trying to take in the significance of his attitude. It took her aback.

He returned to the kitchen whistling; and as she listened Mrs. Jocelyn felt a spark of rage take life within her and leap up to fire her brain. He was ignoring her fiat! as though it had been baby talk. He thought it was not worth consideration. She knew him. She knew his moods and habits of thought. She knew how he would be if he had taken her seriously. Well, she would show him. "Fred!" she called.

"Yes?" he answered cheerily. "Want another cup of tea?"

"No. Come here." She sat up, looking worn and bedraggled after the night's physical and emotional strain. He came in to her presently, without hurry. There was almost a quizzical expression on his good-looking face; the look he always assumed when he expected a "blowing up." He sat on the foot of the stretcher bed and said: "I suppose you are going to blow me up for not coming home last night? Well, go ahead."

"No, I am not going to do that at all." She was quiet, now, and determined looking. "You are pretending that nothing happened last night between you and me, aren't you. Well, it did

happen. Do you get me? What I said last night goes. No pay, no me. You are just a man to me, now. Husband is only another word for man."

His derisive humour changed to a look of petty disgust. "Aw, cut it! You're making a fool of yourself." He flung himself upwards, with his hands in his trouser pockets. "Look here, my girl, do you think I would live with a woman of that sort?—making her husband pay for her as though she were a ——."

She cut in quickly: "That's for you to say. I don't care if you live with me or not. I don't like you any more than I do other men. And there are plenty of other men here, you know, Fred."

He paled to dead white. His eyes opened wide and took on a glassy, though violent sort of stare. "Oh! So it is other men you want, is it, you——"

"No, it is not! I want no man! I hate the sex part of all men. That's why I won't have you unless you keep me properly. If I loved you I suppose I would. I'll give my body to no man unless he pays me for it. I've given you something for nothing all along. It's not—not good business, Fred. If I had no children to keep I would have no man; but I have got children—your children, and the only way I can keep them is by giving myself to men. Well, you're just a man. You don't occupy any privileged place in my life."

He was shaking; she believed with rage. He gulped his words out. "Oh! Don't I? I'm

your husband but I don't occupy any privileged place! I'm just a man! When I want my wife I've got to pay for her! You god damn fool! Do you think I'll live with you on those conditions. Do you think I'm a crawling skunk like that? I've half a mind to choke the life out of you for that!"

She was afraid of him. She trembled too, and wanted to crouch beneath the blankets, but stubbornly held out. The older children had wakened and peered in at the door, frightened. She wanted to drive them away but did not dare to divert her attention. "I say you can please yourself about living with me!" she cried. "I've got to keep the children, and the man that has me will keep them. He will bring me the whole of his pay regularly."

He thought, hardly and savagely, for a few moments, then said queerly: "Well, if you stick to that, I'm finished. I won't come home again."

Her heart plumped like lead. She was amazed. Why was it? She did not love him! did not even like him. She liked the young man of last night better than him. It did not matter if he did not come home again. So said her mind—yet the whole of her body protested that it did matter. Her stomach seemed jellied; her bosom was cold. But she answered: "Very well; then don't come home again. There are plenty of single men here who will keep me."

He stepped towards her triumphantly. "But I thought you said you would have no man if you had no children to keep?"

"Don't be silly. I have got children—your children."

"Yes! my children! my children! And my children go with me! Do you think I will leave my children with such a mother?"

She flung herself back on her hands and her hair fell about her wildly. "What? What do you say? My children?"

"You know the law of the land. The children belong to me."

"But you don't keep them!" she shrieked and struck at her mouth with her hand.

He thrust out his jaw. "And neither does any other man!"

They glared at each other for ages, it seemed, but the woman was plainly giving way. Soon her beaten eyes dropped and her head fell upon her breast.

He softened. He looked from the children to her, then stooped and kissed her gently. He felt himself very forgiving. Then he went out of the room and away to work, feeling pleased he had settled that business.

And as he went out of the door Mrs. Jocelyn thought of the others and muttered painfully: "Yes, that's—what—you—think."

THE PERFECT MOTHER

Mrs. Macdonald and Mrs. Leitrim were friends. But Mrs. Leitrim was a thorn in the side of Mrs. Macdonald because of her exceeding righteousness.

Mrs. Macdonald was an easy-going soul, buxom, not too big, not too tidy, either, but full of rosy goodnature. Everybody loved her.

Mrs. Leitrim was a commanding woman. Strikingly handsome in a blonde way, meticulous of speech and not sparing of it; a managing woman, superior. Everybody admired her.

The two women were close neighbours in the mining town of Millerton, West Coast. Mrs. Macdonald's husband was a miner; Mrs. Leitrim's the company's head clerk. An "accountant," Mrs. Leitrim styled him. This vocational distinction gave the latter woman an advantage over Mrs. Macdonald to start with. Not that Leitrim made more money than Macdonald. He did not make as much. Mike Macdonald was a "pillar" man, one of the "royals," who knew just about all there was to know about scientific mining. But clerking was clean, refined and a one-shifted job. Mrs. Leitrim was not "messed about" with changing

mealtimes, disturbed nights and the other incidentals to weekly changes of shift, as Mrs. Macdonald was. She found it easy to be tidy and methodical. She had only two children, too, to Mrs. Macdonald's four.

Mrs. Leitrim was not aware that she was a thorn in her friend's capacious side. She would have been hurt had she known it. For she was fond of Mrs. Macdonald; had no intention of making comparisons and no wish to do so. She could not help her own orderly existence and was very broad-minded and tolerant (except in one direction) besides. She was an intellectual. Before her marriage she had participated in the political agitations of New Zealand. Without attaching herself to any definite party aspect, she had been known as a sincere and implacable agitator for reforms, chiefly in regard to woman and child welfare. Her single life from childhood onward to the time of her marriage had been crowded with incident, riotous with colour, flaming with the fires of a daring and courageous self-expression. A "career" had been open to her. She had been considered the coming woman, and yet—for love of a man and desire for a child she had pushed aside ambition and settled down.

At this time she had two baby boys, two beautiful baby boys.

She had told Mrs. Macdonald of her pre-marital ambitions; of what they had meant to her—every-

thing in the world worth living for—till love had come and with it visions of and cravings for motherhood.

"Yes," she would say. She talked such a lot she was bound to repeat herself a good deal. "I loved the public life. I lived for it. I felt that I was fitted—without boasting, Mrs. Macdonald, really, without boasting, I felt that I was fitted to do great things in politics."

"Of course you were," Mrs. Macdonald would put in obligingly and admiringly. "Of course you were. Everyone knows how wonderful you were. You can do great things yet if you want to. You didn't die when you married——"

"No, no!" Mrs. Leitrim would interrupt. Like all great talkers and doers, she thought other people's opinions quite irrelevant to a discussion. "No, no. I don't want you to misunderstand me." (There was no use at all in Mrs. Macdonald trying to interpose to the effect that she did not misunderstand.) "I've quite given it up. I made my decision. It was public life or private life and I chose private life."

"But, my dear, you didn't die when . . ."

"No, no, Mrs. Macdonald! I have no intention of ever going back to it; at least, not till the children are grown up. A mother's duty lies with her children." Mrs. Leitrim would whisk off her pince-nez, flourish them, wipe them and plant them firmly on her classic nose again. "Now, you

mustn't misunderstand me, Mrs. Macdonald. I don't regret it in the least and never will. I adore my children——" Here Mrs. Macdonald would insist on pushing in :

" Of course you do, my dear. All mothers love their children."

" But what I mean, Mrs. Macdonald, is that I don't take my motherhood lightly. I realize the responsibilities of the parent ; especially of the mother. Those responsibilities quite preclude the possibility of politics for me until the babies are grown up. But I don't regret it ! Oh, no ! I adore them ! " And Mrs. Leitrim would quite shame poor Mrs. Macdonald with her correct speech and manner in regard to the children. Her :

" Do you want attention, darling ? " and the child's : " Yes, please, Mummy dear," made Mrs. Macdonald blush for her own :

" You little devil, messing round the place. I've half a mind to rub your nose in it."

But she liked her admirable neighbour very much. She was not at all jealous of the perfection which was the thorn in her side because of her husband's attitude towards it.

The Macdonalds had been comfortable enough before the Leitrims settled next door a year before this time. Mrs. Macdonald had muddled along in her happy-go-lucky way ; letting the children go a tiny bit dirty if she felt disinclined to clean them ; running up bills at the grocer's while she wasted the

money on pretty clothes of which she took no care ; playing tennis, going to the pictures, and dances ; having a good time, in fact, as she considered it. She still had her "good time." But after the Leitrim's perfect household had been established next door Mike Macdonald's complacent, amiable forbearance of his wife's frivolous, easy-going ways had gradually changed. He was a quiet, home-loving sort himself, very fond of the children.

Leitrim had set him carping at his wife. Leitrim was not too clever, not commanding ; not superior in any way and he realized it and could never be grateful enough to his wife for marrying him. He sounded her praises to all and sundry ; descanted on her housewifely virtues, her economy, her cleanliness and orderliness, but most of all on her Perfect Motherhood. And all his praises were deserved, as everyone about could see. Macdonald was always about. Leitrim and he were as friendly as the two women and most of their spare time was spent gossiping. Result, that Mike began to poke his nose into his wife's business, as she expressed it ; began to make unpleasant remarks about women that could not stay in their homes, that thought more of dancing and gadding about than of their children. But Mrs. Macdonald never got nasty. She would laugh in her soft, chuckling way and say something like :

"Oh, well, Mike, I know I'm not perfect. You'll have to put up with me as I am." Even when

he got to making straight-out comparisons between her and Mrs. Leitrim, Mrs. Macdonald felt no animus against her neighbour and little against him. A little fitful exasperation was the extent of her reaction to his criticizms.

" Mrs. Leitrim is a big woman," she would usually say at these times, not being very versatile in her ideas. " She's big. I'm only an ordinary woman. She's clever and intellectual. I'm not."

" You can learn," he would argue. " And you don't need to be intellectual or clever to clean up a house and wash the kids. Or to stay home from dances either. Mrs. Leitrim won't go out dancing and leave her kids till three o'clock in the morning like you do. It's not right." Once she asked Mike, apropos of Mrs. Leitrim's perfect motherhood :

" Do her children love her any more than mine do me, Mike ? " He had to answer : " No," to that but made it as sulky as he could. For Mrs. Macdonald's children adored their mother, who let them play in the dirt with other children as dirty as themselves, was reasonable about naughtiness and always generous in regard to lollies. Mike added after a pause, during which his wife had hummed a tune pleasantly as though his admission had settled everything :

" But her children love her, too, don't they ? "

" Yes, they love her. Anyone would love her," she put in in a burst of generosity, " I love her. She's lovely. But you can't make me over into a

Mrs. Leitrim, Mike. I'm all right. I enjoy my life."

"So does she. She's happy in her home and children and husband." Baffled, his wife went on undressing the children, slapping one here, swearing mildly at another there, at the same time as she dressed herself for a dance.

"Get cleaned, Mike, and come with me," she urged. "Come and have a bit of fun. What's the use of digging your own grave? The kids will be all right. You're getting Mrs. Leitrim on the brain. You'll be in love with her next." He smiled shamefacedly at that and muttered:

"Don't talk rot. You know very well I only want my wife to be as good as another's." She stood in the door and regarded him quizzically.

"Your wife's all right, Mike. She's happy. Are you coming?"

"No!" he snapped petulantly. So she went to the dance alone, had a jolly time and tumbled into bed at two in the morning. Mike brought her in a cup of tea when he got his own breakfast at seven, after which she got up, drowsily. The children had long been out on the road in their night-clothes, shouting, quarrelling and playing. When Mike passed Leitrims' on his way to work it soured him to see their two little boys washed and dressed and their mother out sweeping the rocky yard floor.

"Good morning, Mr. Macdonald," Mrs. Leitrim

called out briskly. (Mike's wife would have said: "Hallo, there!")

"Good morning. You're up early as usual."

"Well, it is not that I dislike my bed. The children drag me out." Mike went on his way thinking how handsome she was. Leitrim ought to be proud.

The one subject on which Mrs. Leitrim was not broadminded and tolerant was that of sex. She had married at thirty. Being splendid looking she had been much sought by men, but, as she often told Mrs. Macdonald, though she had liked men very much and was really quite passionate—yes, she would freely admit she was really a passionate woman—she had preserved her moral character; she had kept men in their place.

"Of course, Mrs. Macdonald, I don't presume to criticize others. I don't want you to misunderstand me. I realize that human nature is human nature and that some poor things are weak. We can't all be cut of a pattern. I don't take up a hard attitude on the matter, Mrs. Macdonald. Oh, no! But there must be a limit to toleration in the interests of the race. Laxity must not be allowed to degenerate into licence. If you had only seen what I've seen around the jazz halls in Wellington and Auckland you would realize the necessity for limitations. This filthy jazz!"

Mrs. Macdonald, who had seen quite a thing or two around the tin huts of the miners, who had let

Mike get her " into trouble " in the first place and had more than one innocent skeleton in her cupboard in regard to sex since, always felt particularly at a disadvantage on this subject. Not embarrassed. Oh no. She was too naturally philosophical for her conscience to be pricked by the other's preachments and predications. Everything was all right so long as it was all right, was her motto, and she was all right. Only she could never find anything satisfactory to say about the matter. And this was the only subject that Mrs. Leitrim ever invited her to give an opinion on, strange to say. She thought at times it was rather funny how Mrs. Leitrim harped so much on certain aspects of sex ; for instance, marital infidelity ; denouncing it, expansively, and yet there seemed always a question in her tone and words. Her extremist animadversions—she got passionate on the subject at times—would be accompanied by a sort of straining demand by her eyes for confirmation by Mrs. Macdonald. The latter felt this but could not understand it. She would murmur :

" Yes, yes, I suppose you are right, my dear. You're always right. But what I say is : live and let live. We've only got one life." Which kind of remark seemed to rouse impatience in Mrs. Leitrim. One day she became almost bullying in her efforts to make her friend agree with her.

" Live and let live, yes, Mrs. Macdonald, but you must admit that the mother who doesn't put her

children first, before all things, is the lowest kind of person ? "

" I don't see how it affects the children," Mrs. Macdonald answered mildly.

" Oh, it must ! You can't hide these things, Mrs. Macdonald. Look at my two darlings, my two beautiful boys." Mrs. Leitrim had one on her knee and the other standing beside her in Mrs. Macdonald's kitchen. " Suppose I took a lover ? Could I be the same mother to them ? To my beauties ? "

" Well, I don't know much about these things," the other said uncomfortably. " You are too—too real. You make so much of everything."

" Oh, if a thing has to be done it ought to be done properly." Was there a feverish note in Mrs. Leitrim's voice ? Mrs. Macdonald looked at her. She looked nervous, a condition which was altogether ridiculous in her. " No, Mrs. Macdonald. A mother can't love her children and man too. The two things act one against the other. The good mother must be wrapped up in her children. When I think of these two wonderful bodies that I have created, that I gave up my life for.—Now don't misunderstand me ! I gave it up willingly ; I deliberately made my choice, and I don't regret it. No, not for an instant. I don't regret it." There was more than nervousness in her voice now ; —hysteria. She pressed her boy to her breast and showered kisses on his upturned face.

Mrs. Macdonald was positively startled.

"But children are a tie, aren't they, Mrs. Macdonald? A great tie. I see why nature made the mother-love so strong."

Now it is irrefutable that the intuitions of the simple ordinary woman are the strongest kind of intuitions. Mrs. Macdonald's timid mind here made a leap to an astounding conclusion, though she had never heard of psychology, never heard of complexes, of inhibitions. And on the strength of her impulsive understanding she asserted herself.

"Now look here, my dear," she said firmly. "You're making a hash of your life with your fool ideas. Look at me. Ain't I happy. Aren't my children happy and healthy? I'm not a passionate woman; I could go along for ever without seeing a man; Mike's mostly a nuisance to me. But more than once I've had another man. It just came my way and I took it. And I'm no worse for it either. No one's any the worse. Now you just put that in your pipe and smoke it."

Mrs. Leitrim stared with wide-open eyes. Then she burst into tears, rose hurriedly, took one child by the hand and the other under her arm, cried hysterically:

"You've done a bad thing to-day, Mrs. Macdonald; I depended on you; I trusted you and now you've done a bad thing;" and almost ran out of the house.

Mrs. Macdonald cried too. "Oh the poor soul! The poor soul!"

Thereafter, when Mike carped and sulked and made comparisons she smiled indulgently. She even tidied up a bit, to oblige him. Until his nagging got so intense and constant as to seriously threaten her domestic life. Mike had Mrs. Leitrim on the brain, it seemed, though he mentioned her name less and less. Mrs. Macdonald began to cry a little and she went out more than ever. She discovered a temper in herself and kept it no secret from Mike. She had the back-blocks woman's habit of talking to herself and now as she went about her housework she muttered disjointedly.

"Yes, he's in love with her and doesn't know it. —He's bothered and worried because he doesn't know what's the matter with him.—Thinks he wants me to be clean and tidy and stay home when what he really wants is her.—He hardly ever comes to me now, at night.—He's got her in his mind all the time and the best he can do is to try to make me act like her—" And so on.

But she never allowed the other woman to suspect, nor did she enlighten Mike as to her conclusions. She had her pride.

Mrs. Leitrim had been different to her friend ever since that day of disclosures. Not less friendly, but different. A little more superior in her manner, perhaps; obviously an unconscious attitude, and less discursive. She tabooed the subject of sex

completely. More assiduously than ever she devoted herself to her children.

They had a friend, the Leitrims, a gentleman from Christchurch, who often stayed with them for a day or two. Mrs. Leitrim had informed Mrs. Macdonald that " Jarvis " was an old companion of hers before her marriage. In fact, he had greatly desired her for his wife but had behaved like a brick when she chose Leitrim. And Leitrim was awfully decent about things. He quite understood that a friend was a friend and heartily welcomed Jarvis to their home. Jarvis would have been a better match, she agreed with Mrs. Macdonald. He had a good business. In fact it was his business that really brought him over the Island to the Coast. But then, she had been awfully keen on Leitrim. And she did not regret it. Oh, no !

After this friend's visit she had been in the habit of running across and chatting intimately to Mrs. Macdonald of the talks she had had with Jarvis. His visits meant so much to her. He had been a part of the old busy life ; part of the turmoil ; the chase, the fight. Mrs. Leitrim's fine eyes would flash and her nostrils quiver at the sound of the very word " fight." Sometimes she would close those eyes and seem to listen like a huntsman awaiting the horn.

But when Jarvis came again, stayed two days and went, she kept away from her friend ; pointedly avoided her eyes when she had to come outside.

Mrs. Macdonald was usually at the back door or not far from it. And for some intuitive reason the latter did not go over to Leitrim's. She did not know why. Usually the two ran back and forth haphazard, in the homely manner of the hospitable West Coast. And Mrs. Macdonald was puzzled to catch a glimpse now and again of Mrs. Leitrim at her window, staring across at her friend with a white straining face. Even from a distance Mrs. Macdonald could feel the question in her look.

As the only topics of interest in the New Zealand mining towns are the doings of one's neighbours, Mrs. Macdonald began to think seriously about Mrs. Leitrim; to worry a bit; even to wish that she would leave the place. She felt a bit sorry for Mike too, now, and ceased to cry in secret.

"The big boob," she thought with contemptuous good-nature, having Mike's tousled red head and ugly thick features in mind. "To fall for a woman like her. She hardly knows he exists. She's not in our class."

But Mrs. Leitrim came back in a day or two her old charming self.

"I see you've had your friend to visit you again," said Mrs. Macdonald.

"Yes, Jarvis was over on business. But I don't think I shall have him to stay any more, Mrs. Macdonald. After all, it is hardly the thing for a married woman to have a man staying in the house when she is alone. And Harry could not stay away

from work, of course. I don't want you to misunderstand me or think me straitlaced. I'm not. It would be inexcusable for a woman of my advanced trend of thought to be prudish or intolerant, but—really, the children must be considered. It is my duty as their mother not to risk my good name. I can't run the risk of having the neighbours talking. And in these places—. You know what these places are for scandal, Mrs. Macdonald."

"Why, good God, yes! Of course they scandalize! Why shouldn't they? What else is there to do? But they don't mean anything by it. There's nothing in it. But as for you! Having a gentleman friend come to stay with you for a day or two! Why, nobody even dreamt of saying a word! Nobody even thought a thing about it! Bless my soul! What ever put that into your head? Making too much of everything again! If it were me, now, or any of the others like me, but you can do as you like, my dear. And anyhow, you didn't die when you——"

"No, no!" There was a distinctly tired note in Mrs. Leitrim's voice. "I didn't die when I married. But I am one of those people who must do things thoroughly, Mrs. Macdonald, if they do them at all. I won't risk the merest suspicion falling on my children's mother. I told Jarvis not to return. Surely you think I did right, Mrs. Macdonald?" The questioning note was urgent, the straining demand for agreement.

"I think you're a damn fool," said Mrs. Macdonald shortly. "Children indeed! What your children want is a human being for a mother, not a blooming iceberg or an autom—autom—what the devil is the word? How long do you think you'll last out in a place like this? If you ask me, you're a nervous wreck now. And you that big and fine and strong. You're a fighter, you are. You want fight, and when you can't get fight you want man."

Mrs. Leitrim jumped, positively jumped.

"Oh! How dare you, Mrs. Macdonald? I've —I've done with you! I'll—I'll never speak to you again! You're a bad woman!" She picked up her children, her two beautiful boys, one in each arm and made for the door. Her voice was high-pitched; tears rained down her face. "I trusted you! I—I depended on you, Mrs. Macdonald, and you've talked like a wicked woman! I'm done with you!" She flew across the yard and slammed her own kitchen door behind her. Mrs. Macdonald sat very still for a long time. She was upset, too. Then:

"I wonder what she depended on me for," she muttered.

The next day came out brilliantly fine. The sun, which was always close to the mining camp stuck onto the yellowish-white clay of a mountain top, seemed bent on giving its inhabitants a foretaste of hell. The clay cracked with the heat and scorched

the eyeballs with its ferocious glare. The tennis court, cut out of a clay bank, was unthinkable. Yet Mrs. Macdonald felt that she would rather not stay close to her neighbour. She did not know what attitude to adopt towards Mrs. Leitrim should they both be outside at one time. There was no rancour in her for the harsh words spoken. She suspected hidden fires and suffering of a sort she could not understand. She would have ignored the previous day and gone on as before but she was at sea in regard to the other woman's temper. Impossible to stay inside all day. Indoors beneath the corrugated iron roof would be torture in the heat. She hated to think of her two oldest children in school. Eventually she decided to take the two little ones a mile down the hill to the manuka clumps which grew there in the better soil and sit in their shade and read while the children played about. It would be a heavy climb back with the drag of the children upon her and Mike would have to put up with an improvised tea, which he hated. However, neither drawback weighed much with her so away she went immediately after lunch. Mrs. Leitrim had not showed herself.

The afternoon wilted away slowly and Mrs. Macdonald drowsed in the shade of the manuka. Not altogether comfortably, for her mind would return to the friend who must be broiling up above. She kept tangling the heat of the sun with Mrs. Leitrim's nature, somehow. The whitish glare of

the earth with her glimpses of Mrs. Leitrim's staring, pallid face at her window in the days after Jarvis had left. The broken-backed clay of the mountain with the rents in Mrs. Leitrim's commanding calm wrought by her astounding hysteria. Heat! The mountain seemed to wobble, to totter with it, emasculated to the point of exhaustion. And in Mrs. Macdonald's fancy Mrs. Leitrim tottered too. Once she dozed off, but awakened sharply with the feeling real as life upon her that Mrs. Leitrim's hand had clutched at her; her voice had wailed for help; her eyes had strained for answer to a question. She got up and shook herself and wished it were time to go home.

About four o'clock her buxom, soft body panted back to her door. She was tired out. The heat was still intense, though it had lost the sweltering quality. The sky was further away and faintly blue, presaging the cool of the night. Mrs. Macdonald hated that camp just then. Her amiable spirit was tired as her body. She was not used to mental stress. She was red in the face; the children cried, tired out, too, and her stomach recoiled at thought of the tough steak she had to fry for tea. But nevertheless her eyes swept her neighbour's house for sign of Mrs. Leitrim. She would go over after tea and put her foot down on this nonsense. Wicked, indeed! There would be no living in the place if neighbours took to quarrelling. She was glad to see the two little boys playing about in the

yard. Shut in, of course. A young girl friend was sitting on the front doorstep, too. Mrs. Leitrim was not visible.

At sight of her the girl jumped up and went inside. Mrs. Macdonald clumped wearily into her kitchen and dropped into a chair. She must hurry and light the fire. Mike would be home in a minute. Her oldest boy ran in.

"Hallo, Mum! I say, Mrs. Leitrim's gone down the hill by herself. Went a couple of hours ago on the trucks."

"What!" For Mrs. Leitrim to go anywhere without her children was astounding. Even the child thought so. "What! By herself?" But here the girl came to the door. She had an envelope in her hand which she held out to Mrs. Macdonald.

"Here. Mrs. Leitrim told me to give this to you." She watched Mrs. Macdonald curiously as she took the letter and opened it. The easy-going woman began to read with wonder in her face but she had hardly time to read a line before she dropped it as though it had stung and cried out a sharp "Oh!"

The girl leapt to pick it up and inquisitively spread out the sheet but the woman snatched at it and said sharply:

"Run outside, you two. I've got to get my tea on." The girl went slowly, plainly manifesting her itch to get her nose into that letter. At the door she turned and said craftily:

"Mrs. Leitrim was crying when she went away." Her tone invited questions. But Mrs. Macdonald shut the door in her face.

That letter!

When she had read it she quietly laid it down upon the table and went out and brought in some sticks. She set the fire and lit it. But when she reached to lift down the steak from the nail on which it hung in the porch she missed it, blinded by the gush of tears which ran down her face. The meat smelled. That mattered nothing; it always did in the summer; some vinegar water would fix that. But Mrs. Macdonald brushed her tears aside so as not to miss any of the maggots in the creases; Mike had a peculiar and ridiculous antipathy to meat which had been blown. She hurried to get them all off before he came. She did not want to be crying when he came, either. A little flare of malicious satisfaction, the tiniest flare possible, shot up in her when she thought of Mike, but was gone almost before she realized it. She had a wish, somehow,—it must have been her pride—not even to appear to crow over Mike. She wanted to act as though Mike had never mentioned Mrs. Leitrim to her, nor given a thought to her perfections.

Men! A lot they knew about women! And the less they knew the better. She had sense enough not to poke her nose into Mike's jaunts into Westport. As long as things were all right they were all right. But that poor soul! Despite herself

Mrs. Macdonald was crying when Mike came in. The two oldest children were with him, crowding him, chattering volubly.

"Here," he said at once to his wife. "What's this the kids are saying about Mrs. Leitrim? That she's gone down the hill and left a letter for you?" He stared at his wife's hot, wet face.

"Send them out, Mike," she said.

"Why?" But he told them to "shunt," nevertheless, and when they disappeared took the letter from his wife with a half-ashamed, bullying eagerness. His face as he read that letter was a study. If his wife had been a malicious woman she would have felt amply recompensed for the bother-ment he had caused her. Mike was too naïve to hide his emotions; his blank dismay and consternation. And his—yes, and his jealousy, too. He read it and stood there grimacing, thinking his funny faces a grin, and the paper fluttered to the floor.

Mrs. Macdonald gave him one glance and then busied herself round her frying-pan, but her tears flowed faster than ever and she knew that she was crying for Mike, for her poor old Mike.

He grunted, coughed and tried to speak, becoming aware of his wife. To give him respite she said casually:

"You'd better get the coal in, Mike. Tea won't be long." He took up the butter box they used for a scuttle and went outside. When he returned he

was mad; plain mad. His jealousy had come uppermost and he vented it in the form of virtuous denunciations. The only form possible to him. His wife knew that he was still quite unconscious of his real condition. He was sincere enough.

"So she's gone, ay?" He dropped the coal-box with a thud. "Gone to her precious Jarvis, who'll take her away to America. America!" He seemed to be struck to the heart with realization of the distance between him and America. He stood beside his wife with hanging, limp arms and dropped jaw, his eyes peering from under his bushy red brows, following Mrs. Leitrim to America. He looked like a child in pain.

"Oh, Mike!" Mrs. Macdonald said. Then threw the apron she had donned over her head and cried loudly.

"Now don't you cry for her!" He almost bawled. "I won't have my wife crying for her! A mother! A fine mother! A perfect mother! By God! And she's gone to a man and left them!"

"No, No! Mike! It isn't the man she's gone for. It's the politics, the life. I always told her she wanted fight."

"Well, isn't it the same thing? Hasn't she left them?" He marched around the room with hunched shoulders and pugnacious jaw, trying to rid himself of his mortification by shouting it at his wife. His panegyrics of Mrs. Leitrim's perfect motherhood and housewifery had been eloquent

and intense, but had never touched the oratorical altitudes reached by the floods of abuse and invective her perfidy now provoked from him. He picked the letter off the floor and flourished it, picking out phrases here and there.

"And she calls my wife—my wife, mind you, Rosie—her best and dearest friend. I don't want her sort calling my wife her dearest friend. She can get her friends in America, where she's going with Jarvis. My wife's a decent woman."

A dangerous light began to creep into Mrs. Macdonald's eye. Her tears were properly dry now, swallowed up in the flood of Mike's rhetoric. She watched him and thought of lots of things, but mostly of Mrs. Leitrim's strained, questioning look and of her:

"I depended on you, Mrs. Macdonald." Mike smote the letter with his hand. A good hard-working hand, never meant to pull the ropes of domestic finesse, and continued:

"She couldn't stand it any longer, couldn't she? My wife can stand it and so can other women. And she knows 'you'll take care of my babies, Mrs. Macdonald, you are so good and true and so perfect a mother.' My God! My wife to take her kids and keep them! I'm to keep her kids! while she gallivants to America with Jarvis! Politics!" Mike metaphorically spat. "Well, her kids can go to hell where she's gone.——" But here Mike stopped. He was compelled to stop by

the flat of Mrs. Macdonald's hand across his mouth. She was no longer the amiable, easy-going soul; no longer the soft tolerant looker-on; but a woman inflamed to do battle for her sex; the faithful and understanding fighting for her friend. She faced him like a splendid virago, and Mike's bitterness and broken love was smitten out of his simple soul by her greatness in this, the supreme moment of her life.

For it is to each according to his station. Heroines of history may garb their thoughts in heroic words, and high-flown ladies in times of stress find a language befitting the dignity of their place. Mike and his wife belonged to the mines, and their talk furnished all that they needed. It was ugly at times and usually coarse, but——.

Mike lost nothing of the loveliness that lay in the core of his wife's strident, passionate outburst.

"You shut your mouth! Shut your mouth! You're always yapping, yapping, yapping, about something you know nothing about! You shut your mouth and get over to Leitrim's and get those kids! Do you hear? Get over and get them and then wait for him!"

(Leitrim worked till five o'clock.)

And when Mike had gone Mrs. Macdonald heaved a great sigh and trembled a little. Then she turned to the stove and took the tough steak off it. It still smelt a little, the meat, but she thought it would not be so bad if she put plenty of tomato

sauce in the gravy. And as she dealt out each one's portion, six pieces in all, she subsided back into her old soft, lollopy sweetness and murmured :

"Oh, well, two kids won't make much difference."

THE END

Printed in Great Britain by Ebenezer Baylis & Son, Ltd., The Trinity Press, Worcester.